

TAUNTON'S

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 1995 NO. 10

# fine COOKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK



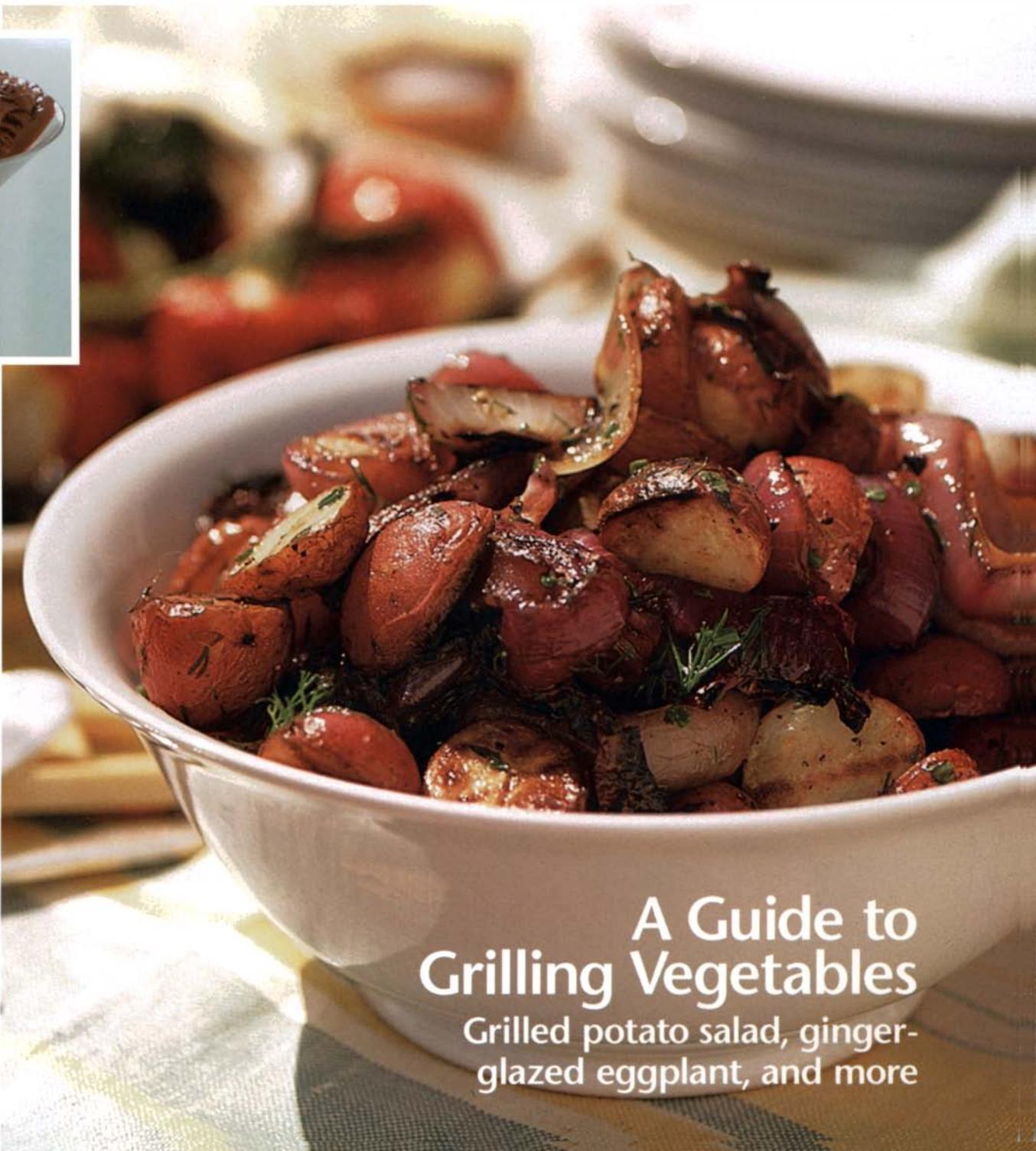
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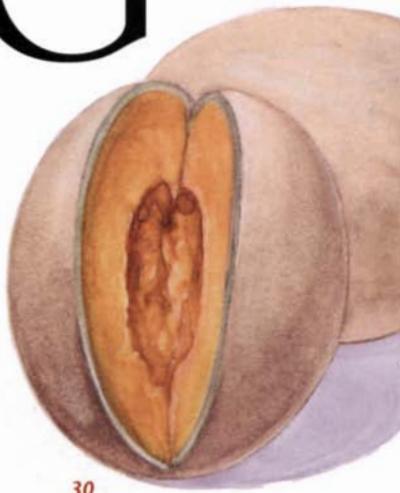
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**On the cover:** *Grilled Potato Salad, "Smoky-Sweet Grilled Vegetables," p. 24; inset, Hazelnut-Mocha Ice Cream, "The Key to Homemade Ice Cream," p. 69.*

Cover photo, Susan Kahn; inset, Mary Ellen Bartley. This page: top, Bradley O. Pomeroy; middle, Ellen Silverman; bottom, Mary Ellen Bartley.

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## LETTERS

If you'd like to share your thoughts on topics like genetically engineered tomatoes, our most recent baking article, or your food and cooking philosophies, here's the place to do so. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

### NIX TO CRISP GREEN VEGETABLES

Why do you think that green vegetables have to retain their raw color when cooked? I refer to the article called "Controlling Color Changes in Vegetables" by Shirley O. Corriher (Food Science, *Fine Cooking* #7, p. 76).

There is a fine line between overcooking a vegetable and getting it just right. A few hours is too long; a few minutes is not long enough. Seven-minute broccoli and green beans taste like what I imagine grass to taste like.

We just had green beans for supper. They cooked slowly in a bit of chicken broth and some chopped shallots for about half an hour, then in a little olive oil and tomato concassé for another five minutes, and they were tender, moist, tasty, and probably even good for us. They were a lovely muted green. They weren't supposed to look raw, because they weren't meant to taste raw.

If we want raw vegetables, we can leave them that way, and they're fine in certain instances. But for me, the barely cooked trend leaves the vegetables neither raw nor cooked. Wasn't it Edna Lewis who, when asked how long she cooks vegetables, said grimly, "Until they're done"?

—Elaine McCool,  
Bainbridge Island, WA

### STORING GARLIC IN OIL? ADD SOME VINEGAR TO MAKE IT SAFE

Regarding Elaine Lickteig's letter explaining the risks of botulism associated with storing garlic in oil (*Fine Cooking* #7, p. 4): this is not the whole story. You can store garlic safely in oil if you have previously soaked the garlic cloves in vinegar for 12 to 24 hours. This technique was described in *Organic Gardening* magazine (September/October 1994). The piece explains that the vinegar soak will increase the acidity of the cloves without affecting their flavor. This increase in

acidity will eliminate the risk of botulism, which can develop in poorly stored low-acid foods.

—Paula Simmons Green,  
Sardis, BC

### DON'T WASTE PLASTIC BAGS

I was troubled by Roy Overton's tip on using plastic bags to simplify clean-up (*Fine Cooking* #8, pp. 22–23). I'm not an environmental fanatic, and I use plastic wrap and plastic bags when appropriate. However, we should all be trying to minimize our use of nonreusable materials where reusable alternatives are available. I've never found it all that burdensome to wash the bowl in which the bread dough rose or the covered dish in which I microwaved my vegetables. A pastry bag allows you to fill muffin tins as neatly as a plastic bag does, and it's kinder to the environment.

—Cyndy Ainsworth,  
Palo Alto, CA

### THIS COOK LIKES MASTERCOOK II

In response to the letter titled "Wanted: Ideal Cooking Software" (*Fine Cooking* #7, p. 6):

I use MasterCook II by Arion Software. It costs about \$35, it is very easy to use and has many functions. Typing in recipes is easy because of the ingredient-name recognition feature. If the program recognizes the name, that means that it's already in the program, along with all the available nutritional information. When a recipe has been entered, you then can process the recipe in several ways:

- ◆ write a grocery list;
- ◆ scale the recipe up or down;
- ◆ list the nutritional information;
- ◆ calculate the cost of the recipe (if you've entered all the figures);
- ◆ plan your menu;
- ◆ and print recipes to share with friends.

MasterCook II is user-friendly when it comes to searching for recipes or organizing all your recipes into "cookbooks." I like to be able to plan menus for special occasions and store them for future reference. I also use the program like an index to find recipes in magazines that I plan to keep. I just enter the title, a few major ingredients, the issue and page number, and some keyword categories.

Like anything worthwhile, using this software does take time, but it sure is nice

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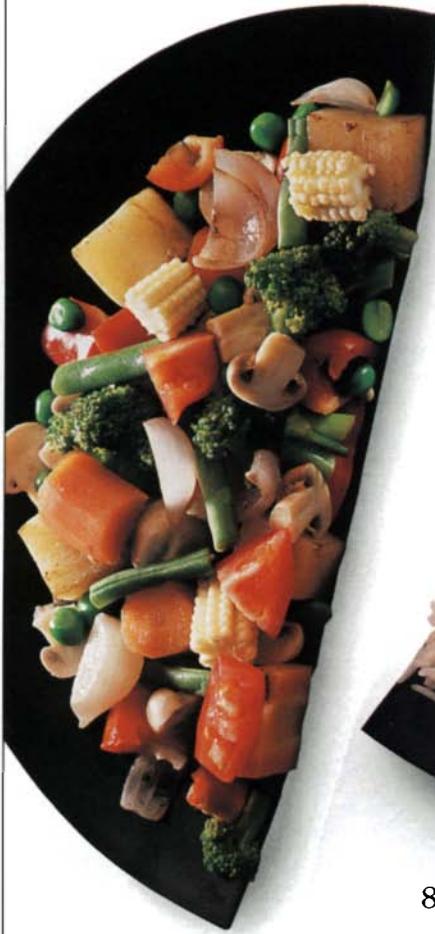
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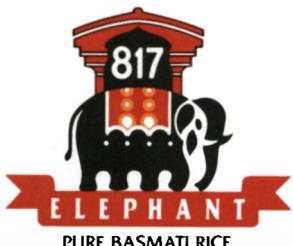
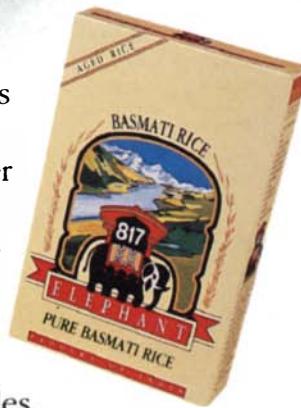
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*Fine Cooking* welcomes article proposals from our readers. We acknowledge all submissions, return those we can't use, and pay for articles we publish. Send proposals to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

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to have my recipes in a place where I can easily retrieve them.

—E. Rebecca Crooks,  
Doylestown, PA

## LOOK ONLINE FOR MORE RECIPE SOFTWARE

I noted that in *Fine Cooking* #7, a reader asked about cooking software. There are certainly a number of recipe database programs available through the Internet and amateur/hobbyist networks and bulletin boards. I have used several MS-DOS and Windows programs over the past six years. I find that I prefer Meal-Master and Quik-Book, both readily available shareware programs (meaning programs that can be downloaded from the network to your PC at very little cost or for free). Each has somewhat different features, and each appeals to a particular group of users. Which program will suit the user is governed by a number of factors, too involved to explain in the restricted format of e-mail.

—Sam Waring, Austin, TX

## A TRUCE ON NUTRITION DATA, AND ANOTHER VOTE FOR MASTERCOOK II

I just had to write again to tell you how delighted I was to see, in *Fine Cooking* #7, the resolution of the "to count calories, or not to count" debate. As it was my letter, in issue #5, that was cited by several other readers, I can't help but feel that I've been able to contribute to the betterment of your fine publication. Placing this information in a special section at the end of the issue should satisfy just about everyone: we advocates of nutritional information now have an easy-to-read, well-designed table to refer to, while all the

detractors of such a practice can simply skip the information. Thank you for such a thoughtful, reader-oriented approach to the problem. You truly are a magazine "for people who love to cook"—all of us.

By the way, I'd like to tell Mardee Wyman, the reader who asked for information on recipe software, that I've been extremely happy with my MasterCook II for Windows. I consider it the most flexible on the market, and after entering and using a thousand or so recipes, I have yet to find a problem with it.

—Diana Stiegler,  
Albuquerque, NM

## IN PRAISE OF IRRADIATED FOOD

Thank you for publishing the letter by D. B. Cameron, DVM, titled "Food Irradiation is Safe and Beneficial" (*Fine Cooking* #8, p. 6). It cheers me to read a rational approach to a topic that usually receives irrational, ignorant opposition.

Irradiation leaves no dangerous residue in food, least of all any radioactivity. As food health authorities Elizabeth Whelan and Frederick Stare write in their book *Panic in the Pantry: Fads & Fallacies about the Food You Buy* (PROMETHEUS BOOKS, 1992. 235 PP., SOFTCOVER; \$13.95. ISBN 0-87975-732-9), "Irradiated foods do not become radioactive, and the process does not generate radioactive waste. Finally, there is no similarity between the irradiation process and nuclear weapons production....Food irradiation offers many significant advantages. [For example,] irradiation of poultry can greatly curb the incidence of salmonella, and irradiating pork can do the same for trichinosis."

Food irradiation is a wonderful technology that can greatly reduce disease,

increase the world's food supplies, and extend human life. I look forward to walking into my supermarket and reading a label that says *Protected by Irradiation*.

—Linda Mann,  
Bellevue, WA

## BE MORE CAREFUL WITH YOUR CANNING INSTRUCTIONS

In *Fine Cooking* #6, you published a letter stating that in the water-bath canning method, you don't need to sterilize the canning jars before canning. This kind of generalization cannot be made about water-bath canning. According to the USDA Home Canning Guidelines for products such as jams, jellies, and preserves that are processed for less than 10 minutes, you should use sterilized canning jars. The Ball Corporation gives the same recommendation as the USDA. I feel, very strongly, that this statement should be clarified for the readers.

Here is the ordering information for the book, which is called *Complete Guide to Home Canning*, USDA Extension Service, Agricultural Information Bulletin #539. Send a check or money order for \$2.75 to Superintendent of Documents, PO Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250, or call 202/512-1800 for Visa and MasterCard orders.

—Bharati Koli Rastosi, Ph.D., R.D.

**Editors' note:** In the article "Hand-Crafted Salamis," by David Gingrass (*Fine Cooking* #7, p. 56), we stated that the curing salt used to make these sausages is a mix of sodium nitrate and sodium nitrite called "Prague powder." In fact, this blended curing salt mix is called "Prague powder #2." ♦



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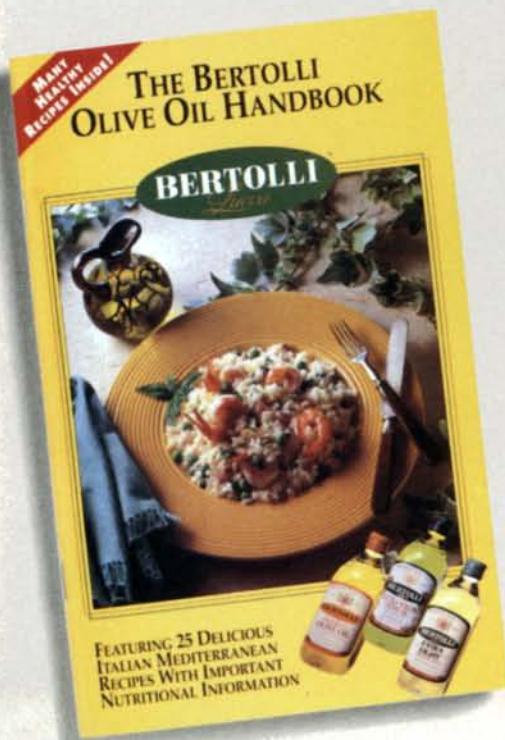
2 Tbsp. Bertolli Classico Olive Oil	12 oz. shrimp, shelled and deveined
2 Tbsp. diced red onion	1 cup peas
1-1/4 cups imported or domestic medium or long grain white rice	1 tsp. julienne lemon rind
1/3 cup dry white wine	1 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
4 to 5 cups unsalted chicken broth, kept hot over low heat	1/2 tsp. salt, or more to taste
	Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
	Finely chopped fresh basil or Italian parsley

1. Heat 1 Tbsp. of Bertolli Olive Oil in a large saucepan over low heat. Add onion. Cook, stirring, until tender, 5 min. Stir in rice and coat with the oil.

2. Add wine, heat to boiling; stir over high heat until almost evaporated. Stir in 1 cup of the chicken broth; stirring, until broth is absorbed. Continue adding broth, about 1/2 cup at a time, stirring constantly. Each portion should be absorbed before adding the next. With last 1/2 cup broth, add shrimp, peas, lemon. Cook, uncovered, stirring constantly, until broth is absorbed and rice is tender to the bite, the dish is moist and creamy, and shrimp are cooked through, 5 to 8 min.

Add remaining 1 Tbsp. Bertolli Olive Oil and lemon juice; stir in salt and black pepper, to taste.

3. Arrange to suit on plate and garnish with fresh parsley and/or basil. Serves 4.



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#### POTATOES ARE NOT POISONOUS

I've read that sprouted potatoes are poisonous. I know I've served potatoes with small sprouts on them, and I don't think I've killed anyone. So at what point do potatoes become poisonous, and why?

—Dana Coonfare, Westerville, OH

**John Logan replies:** Potatoes aren't poisonous; the sprouts are. And even if a potato has sprouted, there's no problem with the potato; just cut off the sprouts, and it's fine for eating. A sprout of any size can be toxic, but you'd have to eat many, many sprouts to get sick. The same is true for potatoes that turn a greenish hue. A potato in this condition is called "light-struck," and it happens when a chemical just beneath the potato's skin reacts to light. The green part will taste a little bitter, but if you peel it off, the rest of the potato will taste fine. Both conditions can be retarded by storing the potatoes in a cool, very dark place.

*John Logan is the director of advertising and quality control for the Maine Potato Board in Presque Isle, Maine.*

#### WHO OWNS A RECIPE?

I usually give credit to the original source of a recipe when I pass it on to a friend. Is this necessary? When a recipe is changed or modified, is the new recipe owned by the new author? Can a recipe actually be owned?

—Michael Rohde, Ellicott City, MD

**Elinor Klivans replies:** There are both legal and ethical concerns regarding recipe ownership, and it isn't all black and white. Legally, the Library of Congress does not extend copyright protection to names, titles, short phrases, ideas, systems, or methods. A mere list of ingredients is not subject to copyright protection, nor are cooking methods. Generally, only the particular manner of expression is protected under law.

For recipes, this means that the language—the specific words an author uses to introduce a recipe or describe a cooking

method—is protected. If someone takes a recipe and simply changes 2 teaspoons of vanilla to 1 teaspoon, but keeps the rest of the recipe the same and then calls the recipe his or her own, that's considered infringement.

On the other hand, one can take the ingredients of a recipe, translate the introduction and instructions into one's own voice, and be protected under the law. But while legally that may be fine, ethically it isn't.

That's why crediting sources as you pass recipes along to friends, though probably not necessary, is good practice. All you have to do is give credit where it's due. I recently wanted to include in my book a recipe that I worked on with another chef. It was a variation on a cake she developed, and I asked her if it would be all right to print the recipe and attribute it to her. She said she'd be honored.

When magazines and cookbooks buy recipes for publication, they "own" the recipe for whatever rights they've bought. Publishing companies register the copyrights of their authors' recipes, but self-publishers can do the same by registering the directions or instructions of their recipes with the Library of Congress. (There's a small fee involved.) For more information, write to the Register of Copyrights, Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington DC 20559.

*Elinor Klivans is a pastry chef and the author of Bake and Freeze Desserts (William Morrow, 1994). She moderated a seminar, Recipe Copyright: What Makes an Old Recipe New, at the International Association of Culinary Professionals 1994 conference.*

#### TARTARIC ACID FROM GRAPES

What is tartaric acid?

—Cathi Cote, Belmont, MA

**A. D. Webb replies:** Tartaric acid is one of the natural organic acids found in plants. Though citric acid and malic acid are commonly found in fruits, tartaric acid is less widespread. The grape is nearly unique in having all three acids. Tartaric acid gives grapes their sharp, tart flavor. That tartness is an important element in the taste of wine. In California, winemakers are allowed to add more tartaric acid to their wine to balance its flavor, but in France they are not.

Tartaric acid has a byproduct that's of interest to cooks. When the potassium salt of tartaric acid separates from wine during fermentation, it forms harmless crystals called tartrates, which collect on the sides of the fermenting tanks. These crystalline deposits are then collected and processed into what we call cream of tartar.

*A.D. Webb is professor emeritus of oenology at the University of California. He contributed to The Oxford Companion to Wine (Oxford University Press, 1994).*

#### ADJUSTING COOKING METHODS FOR CONVECTION OVENS

How do convection ovens work? How do times and temperatures correlate to conventional ovens?

—Ruth Corgan, Cincinnati, OH

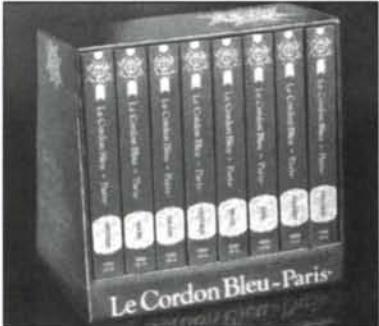
**R. Joseph Goode replies:** Convection ovens, long used in restaurants and by commercial bakers, heat the oven and your food more quickly and more evenly than conventional ovens. They work by circulating hot air inside the oven cavity with a built-in fan. Just as wind makes you feel colder on a chilly day, the moving air heats food more quickly.

There are two types of convection ovens: pure and hybrid. Pure convection ovens force hot air from outside the oven into the cavity. Hybrid convection ovens keep the heating elements inside, allowing you to switch between convection and conventional uses.

Although each manufacturer provides specific use and care instructions, here are some general guidelines for converting times and temperatures from conventional oven use to convection oven use:

- ◆ When baking in a convection oven, reduce the temperature by 25 degrees; when roasting, however, use the same temperature.
- ◆ If an item cooks in a regular oven in 15 minutes or less, decrease the convection cooking time by 1 to 2 minutes. If it takes 30 minutes, decrease by 5 minutes. If it takes more than four hours, reduce total cooking time by 30%.
- ◆ Convection cooking browns food quickly, so you may need to cover food to prevent overbrowning.
- ◆ Covered casseroles benefit little from the circulating air, so be sure to cook

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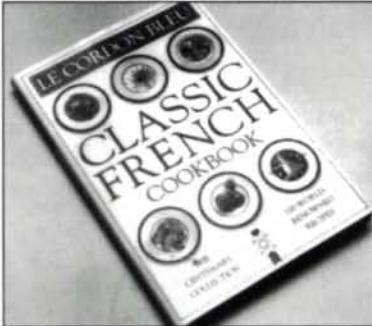
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covered dishes using the same time and temperature given for conventional ovens.

Depending on the oven design, convection ovens can pose problems for delicate pastries like meringues because the moving air can cause the pastry to skew slightly to one side. Some oven brands are better balanced than others, but even the most sophisticated ones cause some movement. The oven manufacturer usually provides tips on how to position pastries in the oven for best results.

*R. Joseph Goode is product manager at Jenn-Air, which has been making convection ovens for 16 years.*

## HOW AIR CONTACT CAN SPOIL FOOD

*When you store something in an airtight container, why does that prevent spoiling or drying? There's still a lot of air touching the food.*

—Helen New, Chicago, IL

**Dr. Douglas Marshall replies:** Airtight containers don't really do much to prevent microbial or chemical spoilage. Whether it's a zip-lock bag, plastic wrap, aluminum foil, or Tupperware, its true function is to prevent the food from drying out. The exception is dehydrated foods, like powdered milk; these should be sealed to prevent moisture absorption.

Bacteria multiplies faster at room temperature, which is why we store food in the refrigerator; however, the cold air that refrigerators blow on food is very drying. If a container protects the food from this air and keeps the food moist, shelf life is extended. Preventing dehydration also prevents flavor loss, because the volatile flavor compounds stay in with the moisture.

Another type of food spoilage—oxidation—occurs within the confines of an airtight container. When oxygen comes in contact with any food, the food begins to deteriorate. This process happens much more quickly in foods containing large amounts of unsaturated fat. This is why many manufacturers use partially hydrogenated vegetable oil; the hydrogenation turns the oil into a saturated fat and lengthens the product's shelf life. Wine also oxidizes, but it's the wine's ethanol that reacts with the oxygen.

Once oxygen has been introduced to food, the process can't be stopped; it can only be slowed. Storing food in vacuum-sealed containers is the best method; the low temperatures of a refrigerator or freezer also slow the oxidation rate. Since light also catalyzes oxidation, keeping the food away from light also helps.

While oxidation usually means unpleasant rancidity (the smell of old cooking oil, for instance), the process has its benefits. Roquefort and sharp Cheddar cheeses get their pungency from the process of oxidation.

*Dr. Douglas Marshall is an associate professor at the Food Science & Technology Department at Mississippi State University in Starkville.*

## WHAT TO DO WITH LUPINI BEANS

*Lupini beans are reputed to be a tasty snack favored by people in some parts of the Mediterranean. When customers buy them from my distribution company, however, they say they often find themselves with an inedible pot of hard, bitter beans. What's the best way to cook and serve lupinis?*

—Betty Brown, Seattle, WA

**Sarah B. Davis replies:** Lupin beans (*lupini* in Italian) have been around for a long time—they helped feed the Roman armies—and there are more than 200 *lupini* species throughout the world. Cooks in the United States, however, have been slow to discover this high-fiber, high-protein bean. This disinterest has been partly due to the fact that *lupini* contain a bitter alkaloid, and it isn't easy to get rid of it. *Lupini* must be soaked in a salt-water brine for four days, with a rinse of fresh water every twelve hours. (The technique mimics the Portuguese tradition of tying the beans in a burlap sack and leaving it in a tide pool for several days.) If that technique seems like too much trouble, *lupini* beans are also available canned in brine. Check the condiment or Italian section of your grocery store.

*Lupini* aren't often eaten as a main course. Use them in soup or pickle them and eat them as a snack. *Lupini* flour has been developed for making high-protein breads and pastas.

*Sarah B. Davis is the marketing director for Lupini Foods, Inc., in St. Paul, Minnesota.*

## SELECTING SHERRY FOR COOKING

*When a recipe calls for sherry wine, what kind of sherry is it talking about? I use a so-called cooking sherry because I'm at a loss as to what to purchase in liquor stores.*

—Elaine Kovacs, Garland, TX

**Paul Bertolli replies:** There are several kinds of sherry suitable for cooking purposes. The cooking sherry readily available in supermarkets is not one of those kinds; it's made from low-quality sherry with added salt. As for the right choice, it depends on what you're making.

If you want the flavor of sherry with no additional sweetness, choose a Fino or a Manzanilla sherry (the designations are on the label). Both of these are quite pale, dry, and delicate, but the Manzanilla has a slightly briny tang.

Amontillado is a fuller, darker sherry with an aroma often compared to toasted walnuts; it also contains a hint of sweetness. Amontillado is perhaps the best overall choice because it can contribute a rich, complex flavor to consommés and marinades.

Oloroso sherry is also full-bodied, dark, and quite rich. (Cream sherry is a very sweet Oloroso.) It's more suitable for flavoring sauces or other preparations, such as stews, that are savory in themselves and wouldn't be overwhelmed by the introduction of an assertive or sweet element. The other categories of sherry, Palo Cortado or Pedro Ximenez/P.X., are best for drinking, not cooking: their fine, sweet, delicate flavor would get lost in cooking.

Prices for sherry vary widely. You don't need to buy the most expensive sherry wine for cooking, but you don't want to use something you'd never drink. Emilio Lustau is one of the largest family-owned producers that makes top-quality sherry under its own label. Other respectable producers include Garvey, Duff Gordon, and Croft Jerez. Harveys of Bristol is famous for its sweet Bristol Cream, but it also produces a Club Amontillado, a medium dry sherry called Bristol Dry, and a dry Fino called Luncheon Dry.

*Paul Bertolli, a chef and co-owner of Oliveto Restaurant in Berkeley, California, is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.*

**LOWDOWN ON LYME DISEASE**

*Are there health concerns in preparing and consuming game, such as venison, from regions of the country where Lyme disease is known to exist?*

—Paul Simons, St. Paul, MN

**Editors' note:** Lyme disease, which is transmitted by the bite of an infected deer tick or black-legged tick, is especially prevalent in the Northeast.

**David Weld replies:** You can't contract Lyme disease from butchering or eating purchased deer meat. It's illegal to sell wild deer for public consumption, and the deer sold to restaurants and grocery stores are raised in pens where there's little danger of exposure to ticks. And since deer don't get Lyme disease, they can't transmit the bacterium. Even if the Lyme bacterium were present in your venison, cooking the meat would kill it.

If you hunt deer, the only time you have to worry about Lyme disease is

when the deer is first killed. There's a slight chance that a deer tick that isn't already embedded in the deer's skin may crawl onto you and possibly infect you with the disease.

*David Weld is executive director of the American Lyme Disease Foundation in Somers, New York.*

**USING OVEN CLEANER  
ON CAST-IRON PANS**

*I regularly use two cast-iron skillets, and over the years a greasy substance has accumulated on the outer surfaces. Nothing seems to remove it, and I'd greatly appreciate it if you'd suggest a way to remove this stubborn buildup.*

—Harry J. Hall, Gaithersburg, MD

**Billie Hill replies:** To get rid of the excess grease on the outside of a cast-iron pan, clean the outside of the pan as if you were cleaning the inside of your oven—with oven cleaner.

Set the pan upside down on the upper rack in the oven and put a foil-

covered baking sheet on the lower rack to catch the grease that will slide off. Set the oven to the temperature recommended on the can of oven cleaner. When the oven reaches that temperature, open the oven, spread newspapers on the oven door, pull out the upper rack, and spray the outside of the skillet with the oven cleaner. Push the upper rack back in the oven, toss out the newspapers, close the door, and let the pan clean for the time recommended on the oven-cleaner can. Take out the pan; the grease should clean off easily with soap and hot water.

If the pan is really dirty, it may take more than one treatment to break down all the grease. Repeat the process as necessary, but be careful not to get any oven cleaner on the inside of the pan. The pan's natural nonstick surface takes a long time to build up.

*Billie Hill is a customer service representative for Lodge Manufacturing Company, a cast-iron cookware manufacturer in South Pittsburg, Tennessee.* ♦

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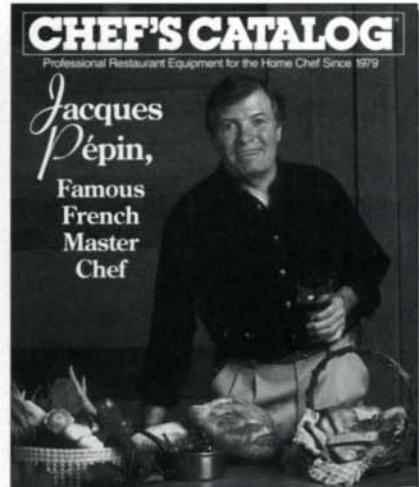
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*Try stir-frying pork strips with some sesame oil and julienne veggies for an oriental-style dish.*

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## Peachy Pork Picante

Coat one pound cubed boneless **pork loin** with **taco seasoning**, brown in a little **oil** in a skillet.

Add an 8-ounce jar of **salsa** and 4 tablespoons **peach preserves** to skillet, stir to mix well, cover and lower heat. Simmer gently for 15 minutes. Preparation Time: 25 minutes. Serves four.

*Nutrient Information, Approximately,  
per Serving: Calories: 263, Protein: 24 gm.,  
Fat: 9 gm., Sodium: 762 mg.,  
Cholesterol: 70 mg.*

*Nutrient analysis done by The Food  
Processor II Diet Analysis Software.  
Pork data from USDA  
Handbook 8-10 (1991).*





#### Pork Piccata Sandwiches

Coat 4 **pork loin** cutlets well with **lemon pepper**. Heat **butter** to sizzling in non-stick skillet. Brown cutlets quickly on both sides. Place cutlets on sandwich buns; serve with **lemon wedges** and sliced **tomatoes**. Preparation Time: 15 minutes. Serves four.

*Nutrient Information, Approximately,  
per Serving: Calories: 341, Protein: 31 gm.,  
Fat: 10 gm., Sodium: 369 mg.,  
Cholesterol: 85 mg.*

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## Aged Sherry Vinegar is Nutty and Robust

I recently tried the Reserve 25 Very Old sherry vinegar imported by Frederick B. Seggerman Selections under the label La Cosecha. The vinegar, which costs about \$10 for a 750ml bottle, has a deep amber color and an appetizing aroma of buttered pecans. It delivers a sharp bite (at 8% acidity, it's a little more tart than most other vinegars), but the acidity

*Vinegar made from sherry has a deep flavor that pairs well with spicy salad greens. Its woody aroma complements sautéed mushrooms, and its bright acidity adds focus to reductions.*

is nicely balanced by a slightly sweet afternote.

While any wine can be made into vinegar, sherry vinegar must start with sherry wine, and therein lies the difference. Sherry—the result of a process of fermentation, aging, and blending that has been refined for centuries in southwestern Spain—gives the vinegar a uniquely robust flavor.

I like sherry vinegar in vinaigrettes, and it has a particular affinity for spicy and slightly bitter salad greens, such as arugula, dandelion, and watercress. I especially enjoy it in composed salads of these greens combined with the meat and juices of roasted poultry.

Try tossing red onions with sherry vinegar before roasting them—the vinegar and the onions make perfect companions. A splash of sherry vinegar heightens the flavor of wild mushrooms browned in a skillet. The vinegar's woody aroma and bright acidity can also provide the right focus to reduction sauces made directly in the pan and to the finishing of longer-cooked brown sauces.

### The methods for aging sherry are used for the vinegar, too.

The age of the vinegar displayed on the bottle—Seggerman also imports a 10 Year sherry vinegar, for example—can be misleading. In making sherry, old and new wines are carefully blended using an established system called a *solera*. This system consists of a network of barrels through which the wines of various vintages are blended and passed during the course of their aging. Traditionally, the barrels are stacked in rows with the oldest wines on the bottom and the youngest on top. Each year, as the oldest wine is drawn from the bottom tier, younger wine from the next tier up is added to the barrel in proportion to the amount of old wine removed.

Sherry wine that has turned to vinegar is removed and left to age in its own *solera*, where it is further blended with vinegars of other vintages. Therefore, the age listed on the vinegar's label is often based not on a particular vintage but on an average of vintages. A case of

"buyer beware"? Perhaps. As with wine, or any product whose claim of age is related to its cost, the final proof is in the tasting. In the case of La Cosecha Reserve 25 Very Old, the price warrants the promise.

For availability in your area, call Frederick B. Seggerman Selections in Haddam, Connecticut, at 203/345-3441; or fax 203/345-3914.

—Paul Bertolli is a food writer, teacher, and restaurant consultant, as well as a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.



## Feather Pastry Brush for a Light Touch

My favorite pastry brush is not only efficient to use but also lovely to look at. It's made from an imported European goose feather and has a handle of braided quills. Its delicate look reflects the situations in which it performs best, including brushing egg wash over fragile pastry or glazes on fruit tarts. Its virtue is that it doesn't disturb the surface of foods as much as a bristle brush, but it's too dainty for tasks that require heavy-duty brushing, like slathering on barbecue sauce. The feather brush washes easily in mild soap and warm water. With proper care, it should last for years, but as it costs only about \$1.99, you may want to have a couple of them on hand. They're available in gourmet cookware shops and catalogs, such as The King Arthur's Flour Bakers Catalogue.

—Susan G. Purdy, author of *As Easy as Pie*, teaches pastry and dessert techniques at cooking schools across the country.

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## A Wine Saver that Works

If you've ever poured yourself a glass of wine from a bottle that's been opened for several days and been disappointed by the flat and acrid flavor, you'll be pleased to hear about Private Preserve wine preserver, one of the few of wine-dom's innumerable gizmos that's really worth having.

Private Preserve keeps wine fresh by keeping oxygen out. Unlike other wine preservers, which essentially suck oxygen out of the bottle, Private Preserve

displaces oxygen by laying down what the manufacturer calls a "completely safe gas blanket" of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and argon. A few short blasts of these inert gases force the oxygen, which weighs less, out of the bottle; the heavier gases remain on top of the wine creating a barrier against oxidation. This process, known as sparging, allows the wine to stay fresh for weeks and even months. (I can only vouch for its effectiveness for up to a week; an open bottle of wine never lasts much longer around my house.)



Private Preserve is particularly useful after wine tastings and dinner parties that leave a surplus of opened bottles of wine that are too good to throw out. It also means I don't have to hesitate about opening a new bottle of wine when I only want a glass to have with my dinner.

**Use Private Preserve to protect more than just wine.** Other perishable alcohols, such as sherry, cognac, and port, will stay fresher after a quick spray. Sparkling wines are the exception; their carbonation and evanescent flavors really don't keep for longer than an hour or so after opening. Private Preserve also works for highly perishable cooking oils, which suffer from oxidation just as wines do. I use it to keep my expensive walnut oil from turning rancid.

Private Preserve boasts more than 120 uses per can. At \$9.95, that's less than 10 cents a dose: small change for saving expensive wine. Noncombustible and easy to use, Private Preserve won't harm you or the environment. It's pressure fed, contains no fluorocarbons, and

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when I only want one  
glass with dinner.**

the can is recyclable. One warning: the can feels empty even when full, which can be a bit disconcerting. You'll know it's empty when it no longer hisses when you try to use it.

In addition to the preservative, you'll also need closures that seal the wine bottle. Used corks won't do the job. A variety of airtight stoppers are available in kitchenware shops.

Look for Private Preserve at fine wine shops and in wine accessory catalogs, such as The Wine Enthusiast (800/356-8466) and the International Wine Accessory Catalog (800/527-4072). For more information, call Private Preserve at 707/252-4258.

—Irving Shelby Smith is a professional chef and a food and wine writer based in Burlington, Vermont. ♦

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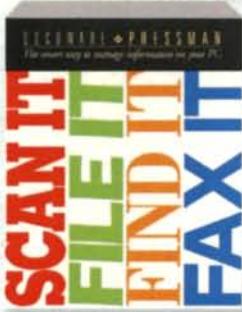
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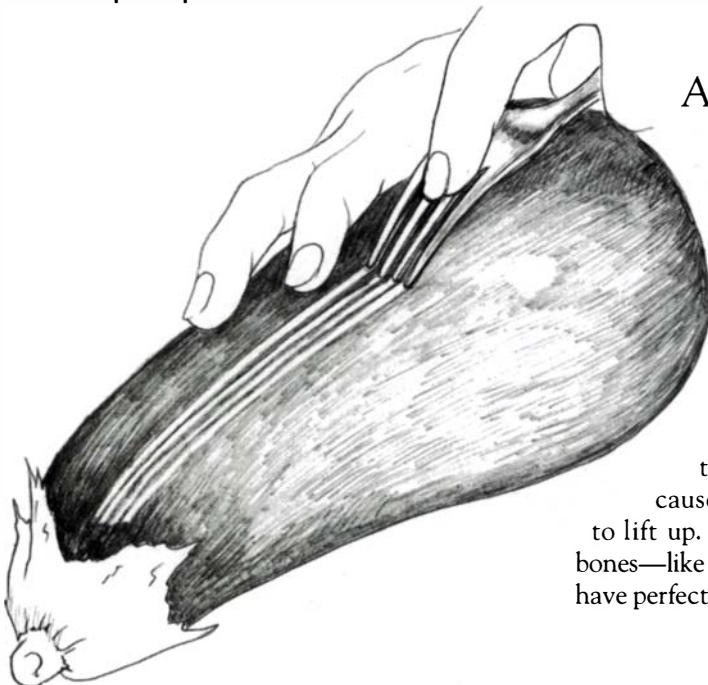
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grain), wrap the pieces individually, and then freeze them. When I need meat for a dish, I remove a piece from the freezer, defrost it partially in the microwave, and slice it very thin—this time cutting across the grain. Because the meat is still slightly frozen, it's easier to cut thinner, uniform slices.

—Pat Hobbs,  
Vista, CA



### A Small Tool for Small Bones

One of my favorite, handy kitchen tools is an inexpensive pair of square-tip tweezers. They're the perfect size and shape for removing fine bones from fish fillets. I feel for the bones by rubbing my hand against the grain of the fillet, which causes the small, hidden bones to lift up. Then I simply tweeze the bones—like removing a splinter—and I have perfect, boneless fish fillets.

—Lyn Nelson-Joseph  
Houston, TX

### Easier Eggplant

When preparing eggplant—especially for grilling—I like to leave the skin on for flavor and because it helps keep the tender flesh from falling apart, but sometimes the skin can become a chewy mess. I compromise by scoring the entire eggplant from top to bottom with a dinner fork. The fork's closely spaced tines leave fine "stripes" in the eggplant's skin, not unlike the way cucumbers are often left with stripes of peel. When cooked, the skin is much more manageable.

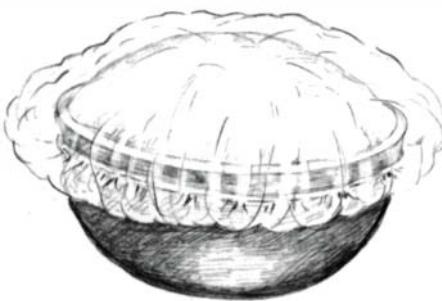
—Michael J. Wodjenski,  
New Milford, CT

### Flank Steak for Stir-Fries

Many of my favorite Asian dishes call for a small amount of meat with a lot of vegetables. The flank steaks I find at my local supermarket, however, are usually large enough to make two or three dishes. So I buy a large flank steak, cut it into thirds lengthwise (cutting with the

### Shower-Cap Bowl Covers

When you need a container cover and at the same time need "head room" for the contents, use an inexpensive plastic shower cap. The elastic will maintain a reasonably tight closure while allowing



the contents to extend above the top of the container. This covering method is particularly handy for raising yeast dough. The cap can be washed and reused.

—Kathy Adams,  
Birmingham, AL

### Baby Spoons for Tiny Cookies

When filling small cookies, such as thumbprints, I find it useful to use an infant's spoon—the kind with a long handle and a tiny scoop. It's also a handy garnishing tool.

—Luanne Conroy,  
Lakewood, OH

### Egg-Free Emulsified Dressings

The traditional method for binding oil and vinegar into an emulsified dressing is to beat in a raw egg, as in a Caesar salad dressing. If you're worried about raw eggs and salmonella, however, many great dressings could be eliminated from your repertoire. Also, egg-emulsified dressings tend to have a very short shelf life. I've found that you can bind a dressing just as effectively by blending it with several tablespoons of finely grated hard cheese. Asiago works best. The enzymes that bind the cheese work just as well to bind the oil and vinegar.

—Jim Rowell  
Duluth, MN

### Sweet Corn Year-Round

During the summer, most of the corn we get from the local farmers' market is sweet and juicy. But when summer is gone and I have to rely on supermarket corn, I have a technique for making it taste "farm fresh." I add  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 full cup of milk and 2 tablespoons of sugar to the cooking water. This gives tasteless corn a fuller, sweeter flavor.

—Nancy Hoffman  
San Rafael, CA  
(Continued)

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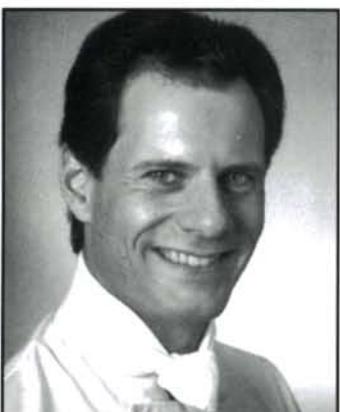


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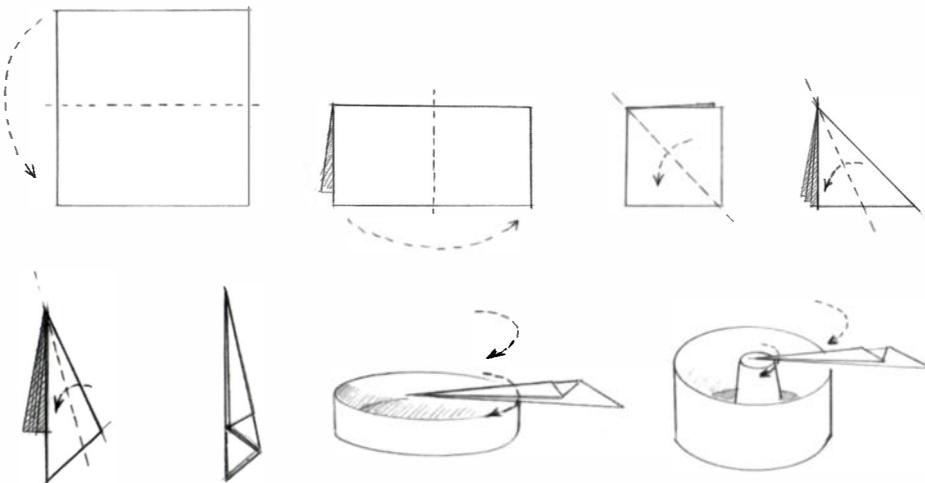
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## Pan Liners that Fit Perfectly

Getting a rectangular piece of kitchen parchment to fit snugly into a round cake pan can be a difficult job. Here's a trick that I like to use.

Take a square or rectangular piece of parchment that's about the same width as the cake pan you're trying to line. Fold it in half and then in half again to make a square or rectangle that's a quarter of the original. Next, fold the closed edges together to form a triangle. Fold the triangle in half along the diagonal. Fold once more so that you're left with a tight, flat "wedge." Place the pointed tip of the wedge on the pan's center point and cut the squared end of the wedge to fit the pan. Unfold the wedge and you'll have a pan liner that's a perfect fit.

This technique works well for angel food cake pans, too. Simply cut the point off of your wedge so that it fits the center post of your pan.

—Margaret Woo,  
Mountain View, CA

## Disposable Bottoms for Springform Pans

I used to have a problem when I created beautiful, show-stopper cheesecakes in springform pans to bring to someone else's home. I'd be on my way home—40 miles away from the partially eaten cake—when I would realize that the bottom of my springform pan was still underneath the cheesecake.

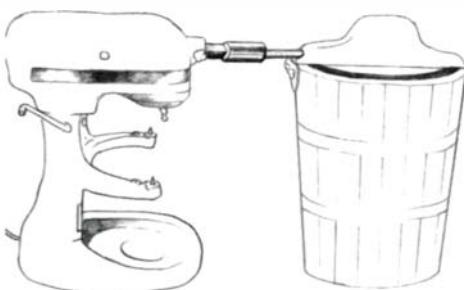
Recently I came up with this solution to the problem. Take a sturdy cardboard

cake circle that's the same size as the bottom of the springform pan and cover it with aluminum foil. Wrap it at least twice. If you don't have a cake circle that fits, cut one to fit from heavy cardboard. Once wrapped, close the false bottom into your springform and put it on a baking sheet. Don't tempt fate by just putting the pan on the oven rack: there's always a chance it will leak.

After transporting your not-to-be-eaten-at-home dessert, unmold at the location, wash your springform ring, and take it home without having to worry about getting the bottom back.

—Louise A. Peterson  
Brooklyn, NY

## Electrifying a Crank Ice-Cream Maker



The best ice-cream maker, it seems to me, is the one that allows the most control over temperature and churning speed. To this end, I have combined the temperature control of my hand-crank White Mountain freezer with the variable speeds of my KitchenAid mixer. I had a local machinist make me a part for \$20, one end of which fits in the accessory

drive on the mixer; the other end has the same thread as the ice-cream crank. By screwing the part into the crank and sticking the other end into the KitchenAid, I can drive the freezer at the speed of my choice.

—Stephen A. Smith,  
Concord, MA

## Cooking Chicken Breasts Evenly

Because boneless chicken breasts aren't evenly shaped—the broad end is much thicker than the tapered end—they



don't always cook evenly. I like to coax them into uniform cooking by making two cuts into the thick end of the breast, about 1 to 1½ inches deep. This technique works especially well for sautéing, but it's fine when baking chicken breasts, too.

—Marilyn Same,  
Sierra Vista, AZ

## Two Shortcuts for Crème Caramel

In *Fine Cooking* #8, there was an excellent article on making classic crème caramel, or flan. I love the dessert, but I don't always feel like fussing with the caramelized sugar syrup, which requires constant stirring and close watching. I've found two excellent shortcuts that eliminate the caramelized sugar.

The first variation is my favorite. Instead of coating the bottom of each cup or mold with caramelized sugar, I use a tablespoon of real maple syrup.

Another shortcut is to pack a tablespoon of brown sugar into the bottom of each cup. It melts during baking and provides a lovely brown "caramel sauce."

—Russ Shumaker  
Richmond, VA ♦

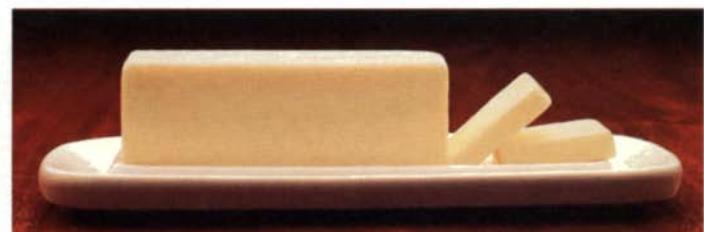
# "I love the flavor butter brings to my cooking."

Chef Gale Gand, Trio, Evanston, IL



**"I can't imagine cooking without it.**

Real dairy butter turns spinach pasta into sensational pasta. Here's what I do. I start with sliced fresh tomatoes and then add asparagus, carrots and zucchini. Or simply add your own favorite vegetables to the tomatoes. In the pan, the butter warms everything, mixes with their juices and creates a delicious pasta sauce. It couldn't be easier. Try it yourself at home."



NOTHING BRINGS OUT THE TASTE LIKE REAL  
**B U T T E R**

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*Try classic potato  
salad with a twist.  
Cook the potatoes  
directly on the grill for  
a crisp-smoky note  
before dressing them  
with fresh herbs and  
vinaigrette.*

# Smoky-Sweet Grilled Vegetables

Almost any vegetable tastes great hot off the fire. Try them in appetizers, side dishes, or with pasta as a main dish.

BY MOLLY STEVENS

If it weren't for outdoor grilling, we'd rarely eat dinner at our house during the summer. When daylight lasts well into the evening, it's almost impossible for me to come inside to the kitchen to cook. Besides, food always tastes better on the grill. Sometimes all I can manage is to brush some onion slices with oil and throw them on the fire. Other times, I'm more energetic—I'll grill an assortment of vegetables and make a colorful antipasto, or make mixed vegetable kebabs, which become a whole meal if I serve them with thick slices of lightly grilled country bread. I also like to grill vegetables to add to other ingredients, such as pasta, couscous, or rice.

## PICK YOUR FAVORITE PRODUCE; ALMOST ANY VEGETABLE WILL WORK

There's wide room for improvisation when cooking vegetables on the grill—just pick what looks best in your garden or at the farmstand. Tender, quick-cooking vegetables are the easiest to work with, and they yield the most satisfying results because you can be sure they'll cook thoroughly. Some of my favorites are bell peppers, eggplant, and mushrooms, but the real winner for me is any type of onion. Leeks develop wonderful pink colors and sweet flavors, baby onions lined up on a skewer explode and caramelize, and red



*Onion slices get skewered for security. The rings stay together so it's easier to turn the slices on the grill.*

onion rings tossed with olive oil and rosemary are a delicious accompaniment to grilled chicken.

## OIL YOUR VEGETABLES FOR FLAVOR AND FUSS-FREE GRILLING

Since vegetables are virtually fat-free, they need to be brushed with oil to prevent them from sticking to the grill. I like to use a good-quality olive oil, along with a handful of fresh thyme, rosemary, or oregano, and plenty of salt and freshly ground black pepper. A squeeze of lemon can add a bright note, too. Sometimes it's fun to combine an intense oil, such as toasted sesame or chile oil, with a neutral oil and throw in some minced garlic, ginger, chiles, or dried spices, such as ground cumin or coriander. But be careful not to overpower the vegetables with too much strong spice.

I use three methods of coating vegetables with oil:

- ◆ The simplest and neatest is to put the vegetables in a bowl, drizzle with oil, season, and toss to coat.
- ◆ You can also put the vegetables on a tray and brush them lightly with oil that's already seasoned.
- ◆ For long, thin vegetables, such as asparagus and scallions, pour a bit of oil into the palms of your

## TURN PLAIN GRILLED VEGETABLES INTO STAR DISHES

While summer vegetables straight off the grill need no further fiddling, I often add accents to brighten flavors and make the simple vegetables feel like full-fledged main or side dishes.

- ◆ Add a splash of balsamic vinegar and a few chopped chives.
- ◆ Squeeze on some fresh lemon juice and sprinkle with a handful of chopped fresh herbs, such as parsley, tarragon, and basil.
- ◆ Drizzle with super-fruity extra-virgin olive oil or an oil infused with citrus, herbs, or chiles.
- ◆ Dress with a loose pesto sauce of basil, olive oil, and Parmesan.
- ◆ Serve with pungent garlic mayonnaise or olive paste.
- ◆ Sprinkle with grated pecorino romano, Parmesan, or crumbled feta or goat cheese.
- ◆ Top with toasted chopped walnuts and a bit of walnut oil.

hands and rub each stalk to lightly coat it.

If I'm planning ahead, I let the vegetables marinate in seasoned oil for a few hours before grilling.

### A WELL-PLACED SKEWER MAKES HANDLING MUCH EASIER

Skewering vegetables in some manner makes it much easier to move them around and turn them on the grill. Also, small vegetables won't fall through the grill bars and into the fire if they're bound together on a skewer. Bamboo skewers are my favorites, since they're slender and don't make big holes in the vegetables, but you should first soak them in water for about 20 minutes to keep the tips from burning.

When constructing kebabs, keep in mind the cooking times of the different vegetables. I think it's best to put only one type of vegetable on each skewer and serve each person two or three small kebabs. For round vegetables, like button mushrooms or small onions, try inserting two thin parallel skewers so the vegetables won't spin when you turn them. A good tip for onion rounds is to insert a toothpick or short skewer through the center to keep the rings together during cooking.

### GRILL POSITION MEANS CONTROLLING THE COOKING TIME

Your fire should be medium hot; the coals should be covered with gray ash but still have a red glow. Cook vegetables over direct heat, but don't crowd them or they'll cook unevenly. You can use crowding to your advantage, however, if the vegetables are done too soon. Push them off to the side and bunch them together. This slows the cooking but keeps the vegetables moist and warm.

### VEGETABLES ARE DONE WHEN THEY'RE TENDER AND LIGHTLY CHARRED

Cooking times will vary quite a bit, depending on your grill, the weather, and the size of the vegetables, so you need to develop a good sense of when each one is done. Vegetables are cooked properly when they're soft enough to be pierced easily with a fork or the tip of a knife but they still have some "bite" to them. And of course you can always take something off the grill, blow on it to cool, and do a taste-test.

While you want a little smoke and char to flavor the vegetables, it's easy to overchar them if the grill is too hot. This develops bitter flavors and also makes it difficult to cook the vegetables all the way through, since the heavy char creates a heat barrier.

**The most important thing about grilling anything is to watch the grill closely.** Each grill has its quirks, and every fire is slightly different. Only by careful tending and by responding to hot spots or flare-ups will you know the pleasure of a plateful of moist, smoky-sweet, warm-from-the-fire grilled vegetables—the perfect summer meal.



*Grilling stuffed mushrooms is an unusual technique—and the results are unusually delicious. Serve the mushrooms alone as an hors d'oeuvre or with mixed greens as a first course.*

*Vegetables go straight from the grill to the serving bowl in this hearty pasta recipe, with just a quick chop on the way.*



Photo: Susan Kahn



## Grilled Potato Salad

This salad is best made with truly new potatoes, but if you can't find the babies, use larger red-skinned potatoes: just blanch them first in boiling water for a few minutes until barely fork-tender. *Serves four to six.*

**3 small red onions (about 1 lb. total), cut into ½-inch rounds  
2 Tbs. olive oil, more as needed  
1½ lb. baby new potatoes, halved (unless tiny)  
2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
¼ cup mixed chopped fresh herbs (choose from parsley, tarragon, dill, chervil, basil, chives)**

### FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

**1 tsp. Dijon mustard  
3 Tbs. white-wine vinegar  
6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**

Skewer the onion rounds with toothpicks to secure them. Brush the onions with olive oil and toss the potatoes with more oil, thyme, salt, and pepper. If your potatoes are very small, slide them onto skewers. Grill over medium-low heat for 15 to 20 min., turning occasionally, until browned on the outside and very tender inside.

Meanwhile, whisk together the mustard, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Slowly whisk in the olive oil; taste and adjust seasonings.

When the vegetables are done, remove the toothpicks and toss the onions and potatoes with the vinaigrette until coated, and then toss with the herbs. Taste and add more salt and pepper if necessary; serve warm.

*Turn grilled vegetables into a robust sauce for penne pasta. Grill the vegetables until tender and full-flavored, and then toss with fragrant herbs, olive oil, and cooked pasta.*

## Grilled Mushrooms with Sage, Parmesan & Prosciutto

Portobellos or large shiitakes are ideal for this recipe, but good-size button mushrooms will work just as well. *Serves four to six as an appetizer.*

**¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese  
3 oz. prosciutto, sliced and chopped fine  
1 tsp. minced fresh sage, or ½ tsp. crumbled dry sage  
⅓ cup olive oil  
Juice of 1 lemon  
1 lb. small portobello, large shiitake, or large button mushrooms (or a combination), stemmed and wiped clean  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
Mixed salad greens (optional)**

(Continued)

## Any grill is fine (as long as it's clean)

You don't need any special equipment to grill vegetables—any grill will do.

The most important thing is to be sure that your grill isn't caked with greasy buildup from previous barbecues, since vegetables easily pick up flavors.

Hardwood charcoal produces the hottest fire and the cleanest flavor,

but briquettes or gas work fine, too.

Smoking or flavor chips can be pleasant when used in moderation, but I generally reserve these for grilled meats and poultry. Branches of fresh herbs give off wonderful aromas on your patio, but they'll add little to the flavor of the vegetables

themselves. Most vegetables are best grilled uncovered, but some of the slower-cooking ones, such as whole eggplant or larger potatoes, do best with a cover. A good pair of long tongs and a spatula are essential grilling tools.



**These slender eggplant are oiled, seasoned, and ready to be grilled. They'll be brushed with a sesame-ginger glaze during cooking. All vegetables benefit from a light coat of oil, which both adds flavor and prevents them from sticking to the grill.**

Combine the Parmesan, prosciutto, sage, and 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Set aside. Combine the rest of the oil with the lemon juice and brush it on the mushrooms. Season them with salt and pepper.

Put the mushrooms, gill side down, on the grill over medium heat. Turn after about 3 to 4 min. Grill another 3 to 4 min. until the juices begin to run and the mushrooms begin to soften. Move the mushrooms to the side of the grill. Spoon some of the Parmesan mixture into each mushroom. Cover the grill and let the mushrooms cook slowly for another 4 to 5 min. until the cheese has melted slightly. Serve warm, alone as an hors d'oeuvre or on mixed greens as a first course.

### Japanese Eggplant with Sesame-Ginger Glaze

Slender Japanese eggplant work beautifully for this recipe, and they don't need to be salted in advance to remove bitterness. If you can't find them, cut a regular eggplant into half-inch rounds, salt generously, and let sit in a colander for half an hour. Pat dry and continue with the recipe. *Serves four to six.*

**1 Tbs. rice-wine or cider vinegar  
1 Tbs. soy sauce  
1 Tbs. hoisin sauce (optional)  
3 Tbs. toasted sesame oil  
1 tsp. sugar  
2 tsp. minced fresh ginger  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
8 small Japanese eggplant (about 4 oz. each), halved lengthwise  
2 Tbs. oil  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
2 scallions, minced**

## A guide to grilling vegetables

*Here's a guide to preparing your vegetables for the grill. The entries are ranked from quickest- to slowest-cooking. All vegetables should be brushed with a light coat of oil.*

### QUICKEST COOKING TIMES

Asparagus	Trim off tough stems
Bell pepper slices	Core, seed, cut into strips
Corn	Peel back husk, remove silk, tie husk back together, soak in water 30 min.; or remove husk and silk entirely, brush with oil or butter, and grill directly
Mushrooms	Wipe clean and remove stem
Onion slices	Secure with toothpick
Scallions	Cut off root ends
Zucchini and summer squash	Slice lengthwise

### MODERATE COOKING TIMES

Baby carrots	Wash but don't peel
Beets	Scrub and cut into small wedges
Eggplant	Cut half-inch slices; for Japanese eggplant, slice lengthwise
Fennel	Remove feathery tops, peel fibrous strings, cut in wedges
Leeks	Cut off root end, remove green and tough outer leaves, split in half lengthwise, rinse thoroughly; large leeks can be blanched for a few minutes first
New potatoes	Halve or quarter
Whole bell peppers	Grill until skin is charred, transfer to a bowl and cover until cool enough to handle, slip off skin

### LONGEST COOKING TIMES

Artichokes	Parboil before grilling
Garlic heads	Cut off top of head
Whole eggplant	Prick with fork



Mix the vinegar, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, sesame oil, sugar, ginger, and garlic together in a small bowl. Brush the eggplant with oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill over medium heat, cut side down, about 5 min. Flip the eggplant and baste with some of the sesame-ginger glaze. Continue grilling until the flesh is quite soft and the eggplant is just starting to collapse. Remove from the grill and drizzle with more glaze. Top with the minced scallions and serve warm.

### Penne with Peppers, Fennel & Basil

I don't bother peeling the peppers for this recipe because I like the way they retain their juices and some crunch, but if you like, slip off their charred skins before chopping. *Serves six.*

*1/2 cup olive oil, more as needed  
4 red bell peppers, cored, seeded, and quartered  
1 head fennel, cut into 6 or 8 wedges  
1 lb. small zucchini, halved lengthwise  
6 Roma or 3 larger tomatoes, cored  
6 large scallions, trimmed to leave 3 inches green  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
6 slices crusty Italian bread, 1 inch thick  
2 cloves garlic, halved  
1 lb. penne pasta  
1 medium bunch fresh basil, leaves washed, dried, and sliced  
Juice of 1/2 lemon  
1/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan or ricotta salata cheese*

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for the pasta. Lightly oil the vegetables and season with salt and pepper. Grill all the vegetables, turning occasionally, until soft and slightly charred (see chart opposite for cooking times). As the vegetables are done, transfer them to a cutting board, chop into chunks, and tip into a large bowl, including any juices. Keep warm.

Meanwhile, lightly brush the bread with more olive oil and grill for a few minutes on each side. Rub with the cut garlic cloves.

Boil the pasta until tender (this should take about 10 min.), drain, and drizzle lightly with olive oil to prevent sticking. Combine the pasta, vegetables, and basil in the bowl and toss to mix. Squeeze in some lemon juice, drizzle on a few more tablespoons of olive oil, and season to taste with salt and pepper. Toss again and serve with the grilled garlic bread and grated cheese on the side.

*Grilled eggplant with Asian seasonings makes an easy and appealing side dish. Slim Japanese eggplant isn't bitter, but you can use regular eggplant as long as it isn't too seedy.*

Molly Stevens is a chef/instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont, and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. She didn't learn about grilling at La Varenne cooking school in Paris, where she earned a grand diplôme, but rather at her home in Vermont, where she makes every summer day last as long as possible. ♦

# Savoring Summer



*Ambrosia has honey-sweet, deep-orange flesh. A great taste, soft texture, and reliable quality has earned it a following in white-tablecloth restaurants.*



*There are dozens of varieties of cantaloupe, surely America's favorite melon. Regardless of type, all "good" cantaloupes should have light- to medium-firm flesh that tastes as honey might if it were as thin as apple juice.*



*Honeydew has reliably sweet and juicy flesh, and it keeps quite well for a thin-skinned melon. It can withstand being picked slightly underripe and shipped without damaging its taste and texture.*



*The Santa Claus or Christmas melon is the one of the best of the winter keepers. Extremely juicy, the medium-crisp, pale-green flesh has a light sweetness that leaves a haunting finish reminiscent of a complex Riesling wine.*



*Golden Rich is sweet, juicy, and firm with a flavor and texture akin to both an apple and a pear. These Asian-type melons are unusually small—about the size and shape of a medium eggplant.*



*A perfectly ripe Charentais has an ethereal taste that I can best describe as sweet, heavy perfume turned to fruit. Its flesh is so smooth and creamy that it can slip down your throat before you have a chance to bite, leaving just its fragrance behind.*

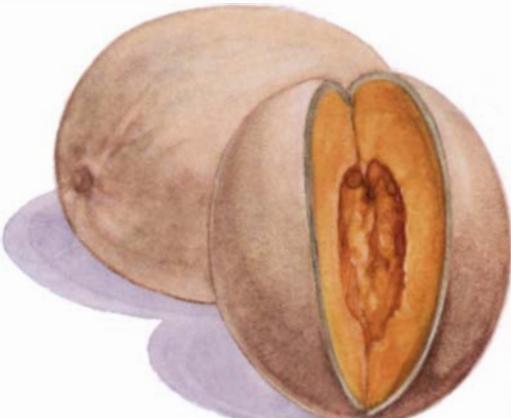
# Melons at their Best



**Casaba** delivers an extraordinary melon flavor. With a hard rind to protect its soft, delicate ivory flesh, this melon keeps well into winter.



**Marble White** tastes like a super-sweet Asian pear. It has a thin, smooth, white skin, and nearly translucent, crisp, ivory-white flesh.



**Sweet-tasting orange-fleshed honeydew** has a denser, smoother flesh than a green honeydew. Overall, this is a more delicate, less spicy melon than its namesake.



**Ha Ogen** (also called Haogen or Israel) is a standout with its green and gold banded rind. A bright gold color indicates that this sweet and spicy melon is at its peak of flavor.

Try one of the dozens of varieties in a salsa, sorbet, or even a seafood main course

BY GEORGEANNE BRENNAN

Melons have a reputation for being prolific breeders. One result of their promiscuity is that there are now countless varieties of melons that come in a huge range of sizes, colors, and flavors. The tiny Golden Rich weighs just three-quarters of a pound and fits easily into the palm of your hand, while Santa Claus melons can weigh as much as nine pounds. The opalescent, ivory-white flesh of a Marble White is a stark contrast to the dark-orange fruit of an Ambrosia. Some melons are smooth and dense, others are slightly crisp. All this diversity is a good thing, because there are as many cultural and personal preferences for the fruits as there are varieties.

Melons are popular all over the world, but exactly what constitutes a "good" melon isn't always a matter of agreement. Preferences in taste and texture differ from country to country, region to region, even person to person. In Asia,



**Cool contrast.** Sweet chunks of melon provide a refreshing counterpoint to the spicy greens and warm red snapper (see recipe on p. 34).

the predilection is for crisp, crunchy melons with a taste and texture similar to that of an Asian pear. Marble White melons are a favorite there. In the southern United States, the slippery-smooth, papaya-like flesh of the Old Time Tennessee makes it a melon of choice. The standard European cantaloupe, Charentais, is characterized by highly perfumed, dense, firm flesh, while the muskmelons and cantaloupes cherished in the United States have a quite different aroma—less perfumed and more honeyed—with crunchier flesh.

To some people, good means extremely ripe: the sugars in the fruit developed almost to the

point of fermentation and the flesh meltingly soft. Others prefer firm-fleshed melons with sugars just peaking. Almost everyone will agree, though, that a good melon is a sweet melon, one in which the sugar content is fully developed.

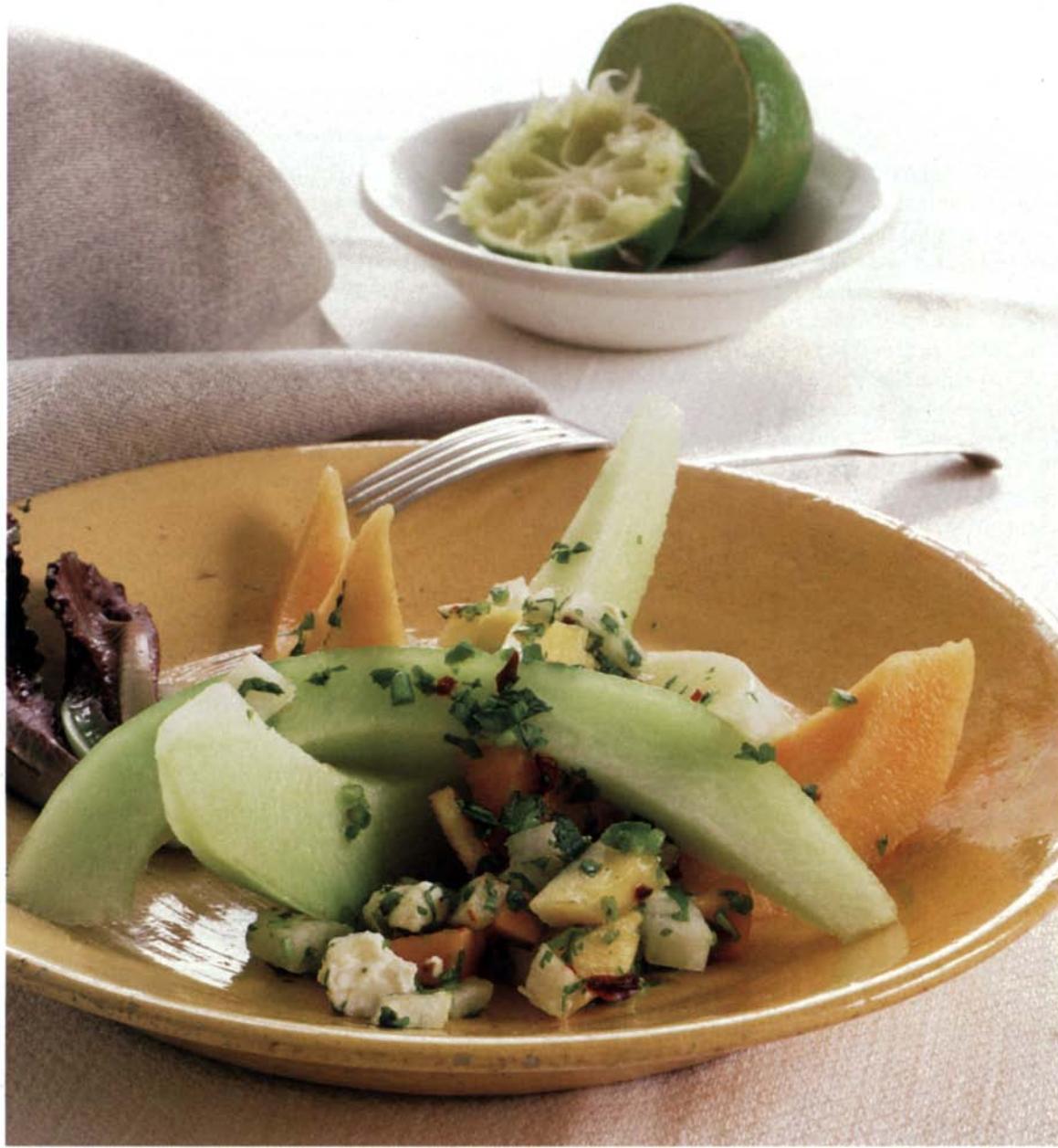
## Melons of all kinds have an affinity for tart, spicy flavors— try chiles, black pepper, or citrus

### CHOOSING A RIPE MELON, BY TECHNOLOGY OR BY TOUCH

In France, where consumers are keenly attuned to the sweetness of their beloved Charentais, some large packers use an instrument called a fructometer to assure customers of sweet melons. A fructometer measures the percentage of sugar in degrees, called brix. A melon with a brix of 12 is considered to be sweet, but the score may go as



*Latin American flavors and textures are natural partners for melon. Here, crisp jícama, dense papaya, lime, cilantro, and tangy cheese all enhance the melon's own flavor (see recipe on p. 34).*



high as 18, with anything over 13 being exceptional. While on a visit to a melon-packing shed in southern France, I watched as a machine cut a minuscule cone from each melon as it passed by on a conveyor belt, read it for sugar content, re-inserted the cone in the melon, dabbed it with wax to seal it, and then affixed a "12 plus" sticker over the wax if the sugar content was 12 brix or higher. Those melons with a sticker were shunted in one direction, those without it in another.

**Most of us, however, have to choose our melons without the aid of a fructometer.** To help you make the best choice, you need to know

two main facts about the type of melon:

◆ **Is its rind thick and hard or thin?** Cantaloupes, muskmelons, and honeydews all have thin skins and are generally consumed shortly after harvest. Hard-rind melons, such as casaba or Santa Claus, are long keepers and may be stored for months under optimum conditions.

◆ **Is your melon a "slip" melon?** A slip melon is one that, when ripe, pulls readily away from its stem, leaving a clean scar at the base of the melon. If picked before it's fully ripened, a slip melon will have a tear in the rind. Slip melons may have either thick or thin rinds. Nonslip melons (Charentais is one)





must be cut from their vines. You'll find them in the market with a bit of the stem attached.

Once you've purchased or harvested a ripe melon, refrigerate it until ready to eat. Some melons seem to be at their best when eaten near room temperature, only slightly cool, since smell is part of taste perception and chilling retards the release of the fragrant, volatile oils.

#### OPPOSITE FLAVORS ATTRACT

Many people eat melons only for breakfast or occasionally add them to fruit salads, but melons are really quite versatile. They can be part of a main course, a savory salad, and of course for dessert. My one caveat for using melons in a recipe is to be sure the other ingredients enhance—never overpower—the melon's true flavor.

Melons of all kinds, from crisp Asian types to honeyed casabas, have an affinity for tart, spicy flavors such as salt, chiles and black pepper, citrus, vinegar, and alcohol. Melons are wonderful unaccompanied, but you can heighten their flavor by serving them with a sprinkling of salt or a squeeze of lemon or lime juice. Freshly ground dried chiles, such as *pasilla* or *ancho*, or chopped green chiles, like jalapeños, enhance the sweetness of melon. Consider too, the classic pairing of half a cantaloupe filled with port, or the Italian custom of wrapping a thin slice of salty prosciutto around a sweet, perfumed melon wedge.

#### Melon, Mint & Watercress Salad with Salt-Cooked Snapper

Fish cooked in salt doesn't taste salty, just well seasoned. The salt helps keep the fish moist and allows you to cook it without adding fat to the pan. Shrimp makes a good substitute for the snapper. *Serves four as a first course.*

1 cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves  
2 cups loosely packed watercress leaves  
1½ cups diced cantaloupe or other mixed melons  
1 tsp. kosher salt  
½ lb. red snapper fillet, cut into four pieces  
½ cup plus 1 Tbs. lemon juice  
½ tsp. sugar

Divide the mint, watercress, and melon among four salad plates, reserving some watercress for a garnish.

In a frying pan, sprinkle the salt evenly over the surface and heat over high heat until very hot. Add the snapper and cook about 1 min. Turn, add 3 Tbs. lemon juice, and cover the pan. Reduce heat to low and cook until the fish is lightly browned, about 2 min. longer.

Dissolve the sugar in the remaining lemon juice. Divide the fish and pan juices among the plates and drizzle with the sweetened lemon juice. Garnish with the reserved watercress and serve.

#### Mexican Melon Salad

You can also make a salsa version of this salad, called *Pico di Gallo* ("rooster's beak") by adding more lime juice and cutting the fruit into smaller pieces. The salsa makes a delicious accompaniment to grilled fish. *Serves four.*

1½ cups peeled and diced jícama (about half a large jícama)  
¾ cup diced very ripe papaya

# How to know a good melon when you see one

Summer is the time for melons. The season's long days and warm nights are just the conditions needed to mature and ripen these luscious fruits.

There are countless types to choose from—*The Garden Seed Inventory, Third Edition*, lists more than 150 varieties—and, since melons readily cross-pollinate and breeders continue to develop an ever-increasing number of hybrids, new types of melons appear all the time.

Check your local farmer's

market—it's likely to be your best source for some of the more unusual varieties. Regardless of what kind of melon you choose to buy, there are some general rules to keep in mind:

- ◆ Overall, a melon should be hard, with no soft spots.
- ◆ A melon should be heavy for its size. Weigh a few that look about the same size and choose the heaviest one.
- ◆ A ripe, good-quality hard-skinned melon will give a hollow ring—not a dull thud—when

knocked, and the skin should be fully colored.

- ◆ When choosing thin-skinned melons, smell the scar at the base of the melon. The fragrance should be immediately noticeable, even if it's only faint.
- ◆ If there is a slip-scar, it should be hard and show no evidence of mold, decay, or tearing.
- ◆ If the melon is not a slip type, such as a Charentais, an ooze of sweet dew may be apparent at the stem, indicating ripeness.



*Exceptionally creamy and rich tasting, melon sorbets are superb (and fat-free.)*

1 jalapeño, cored, seeded, and minced  
1 tsp. minced dried chile, such as California or New Mexico, or 1 tsp. dried red pepper flakes  
1/4 cup lime juice  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1 oz. crumbled feta cheese  
1/2 cup loosely packed cilantro leaves, chopped coarse  
8 thin wedges honeydew melon  
8 thin wedges orange-fleshed honeydew melon

In a large bowl, combine the jícama, papaya, jalapeño, and minced chiles. Add the lime juice and salt; toss to coat. Crumble in the feta and add the cilantro. Divide the melon wedges among four plates and top with the jícama and papaya mixture.

### Melon Sorbet

The distinct varietal taste of the melon is maintained in this sorbet, but a squeeze of lemon juice intensifies its natural sweetness. Each bite is an icy explosion of pure melon flavor. Yields about 1 quart.

2 cups sugar  
1 cup water  
4 cups coarsely chopped melon, such as honeydew, Ambrosia, or White Marble (about 3 lb. whole melons)  
1 Tbs. lemon juice

In a small saucepan, cook the sugar and water, stirring often, until the sugar dissolves. Set aside to cool.

In a food processor, combine 1 3/4 cups of the cooled syrup with the chopped melon and lemon juice and blend to a coarse purée. Taste for sweetness and add the remaining 1/4 cup sugar syrup if necessary.

Freeze in an ice-cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions. Pack tightly into a 1-qt. plastic container, seal, and freeze until ready to serve.

Georgeanne Brennan raises melons on her small farm in northern California. She is the author of *Potager: Fresh Garden Cooking in the French Style* and *The Glass Pantry: Preserving Seasonal Flavors* (Chronicle Books, 1992 and 1994, respectively). ♦

### FRESH WAYS WITH MELON

◆ Scoop the seeds out of an Ambrosia melon and fill the cavity with strawberries that have been soaked in balsamic vinegar.

◆ Fold bite-sized pieces of Charentais into vanilla-flavored whipped cream.

◆ Dress chunks of honeydew with lime juice, lime zest, and coarse salt.

◆ Fan slices of Marble White over a tart shell filled with almond-flavored pastry cream and sprinkle the top with toasted coconut.

◆ Pureé cantaloupe with crushed ice and add a splash of rum to make a refreshing summer cooler.

◆ Serve Santa Claus melon with slices of smoked duck and cucumber.

◆ Combine puréed casaba with white wine and a bit of orange juice for a wonderful cold soup. Garnish with mint leaves and a dollop of sour cream.





*Salmon with Summer Vegetables* offers relief from the kitchen on a hot summer night. The flavor of the salmon is enhanced if you poach it well ahead of time and store it in the cold court bouillon.

# Poaching for Flavorful Cold Salmon

Keeping fish moist and delicious is easy with a few simple techniques

BY PAUL BERTOLLI

I'm happiest eating in the summer, not only for what these plentiful months bring to the markets and my garden, but also because warm weather lets me set my dinner table outdoors. Because warm days require relief from the muggy discomforts of a hot kitchen, chilled poached fish is a part of my summer repertoire. Light yet fully satisfying, it can be prepared with little time and fuss. With a few simple garnishes, fish poached whole or in slices adapts deliciously to meals for just a few people or menus for larger get-togethers and festive occasions. Leftover poached fish also lends itself to any number of summer improvisations.

## RICH, FULL-FLAVORED SALMON IS A GOOD CHOICE FOR POACHING

Of all the fish available for poaching, salmon is the classic choice not only for its appealing color, but also because the large and even "grain" of its flesh gives it a superb texture. The rich oils contained within salmon help to keep the fish moist. Salmon is particularly suitable to being served slightly chilled; its assertive flavor compensates for the muting effects of cooler temperatures. Nevertheless, you'll enjoy salmon's fullest flavor if you serve the fish just below room temperature.

If possible, buy whole, unscaled salmon and poach it with the scales on. Scales provide an additional layer of protection and help keep the fish moist. Scales that are smooth and intact are also a sign that the salmon has not been treated roughly.

## USE GENTLE HEAT AND AN AROMATIC LIQUID

Keep in mind that poaching means cooking not at a boil or even a simmer, but at a point just below a simmer, around 180°F. With a little experience, you will be able to recognize this temperature level readily from the appearance of imminent movement of the court bouillon and the lazy evaporation of the liquid at the surface.

**A court bouillon adds flavor.** Perhaps the best way to prepare salmon that's to be eaten chilled is in a court bouillon (pronounced koor boo-YAHN). The term comes from the French: *court* means short, and *bouillon* is derived from the verb "to boil." Court bouillon is "short" because it's made primarily of vegetables and herbs,



**Herbs, aromatic vegetables, and wine are the makings of a rich-tasting court bouillon. Wrapping a whole fish in cheesecloth protects the delicate flesh but lets the flavors in.**

which means it cooks much more quickly than stocks that are built from meat or poultry. Court bouillon is most often used as a poaching liquid for fish or shellfish, and sometimes for poultry or brains.

Traditional recipes call for a fairly standard combination of ingredients—water, onion, carrot, thyme, bay leaf, and vinegar or wine (red or white, depending on what is to be cooked) are constants. A court bouillon destined for poaching fish should always contain a good amount of salt; without it, the fish will taste bland. Add about two tablespoons salt (I use kosher flaked salt) per quart of water. If you choose not to measure your ingredients each time, try at least to adjust the amount of salt so that the liquid is as salty as sea water. Add wine or vinegar only after the vegetables have cooked in the hot liquid for 12 to 15 minutes—the acidity of both of these ingredients inhibits the vegetables from cooking and releasing their flavor completely. Of course, fish is perfectly fine if poached in salt water alone. The simplest addition is bay leaf, which I believe improves the flavor of any poached fish.

**Don't be shy with your seasonings.** No matter how many aromatic ingredients you add, a court bouillon has only a soft influence on what's being cooked in it, so add plenty of herbs and vegetables. You can make a court bouillon that complements and enhances the flavor of whatever fish you're cooking—just use your imagination.

◆ Fennel is particularly harmonious with fish. I'm lucky enough to have wild fennel growing near my house, but if wild fennel



Photo: Robert Munsch

**Give your fish a handle for easy lifting in and out of the pot.** After wrapping the fish in cheesecloth, tie a length of string just below the gill cover, at the tail, and in the middle of the fish. Loop another piece of string through each of these ties, leaving enough slack to act as a handle.

isn't available, use the tough outer stalks and feathery tops of a fennel bulb.

- ◆ Celery tops are welcome, as are the green parts of leeks or scallions.
- ◆ I sometimes add parsley or other soft herbs, such as basil or tarragon, but I don't recommend chervil: its meek flavor would be lost in court bouillon. Avoid adding strong herbs, such as rosemary or sage: they can overpower the taste of the fish. The one exception is oregano, which is particularly good with striped sea bass.
- ◆ Lemongrass has an exceptional aroma when infused in hot liquids and is very effective in penetrating fish, as are spearmint and lemon thyme.
- ◆ Experiment with more exotic flavors, such as ginger or coriander.

#### ADD SLICED FISH TO HOT LIQUID; BEGIN WHOLE FISH IN COLD

The technique for poaching fish differs depending on whether it is whole or sliced. Obviously, slices of fish cook much more rapidly than the whole specimen. Because of the shorter exposure to the court bouillon, the broth for cooking sliced fish should be simmered before adding the fish so that the maximum amount of flavor has been released from the vegetables and herbs. To do this, cook the vegetables in a little oil or butter over medium heat until they're soft before moistening them with water. Then add the herbs—hardy ones at the start, more delicate ones (that would otherwise lose their bright scent) just before you add the fish. After the court bouillon has developed a rich flavor, drop the sliced fish into the hot broth. If the sliced fish is put into cool broth and heated

gradually, much of its flavor would escape into the surrounding liquid. Adding the fish to hot court bouillon helps to concentrate inside the slice all the flavor contained within it.

**An overnight soak allows the fish to absorb the full flavor of the court bouillon.** Traditionally, recipes for poaching whole fish call for preparing the court bouillon ahead of time and allowing it to cool before immersing the fish. My own method differs from tradition; I simply salt the cool water, add the raw aromatics and the fish, and slowly bring it all up to poaching temperature. Since whole fish is less permeable than sliced, loss of flavor is not a concern. More important, after cooking, whole fish is returned to the cooled court bouillon and allowed to stand overnight. During this period, the fish has a chance to rest in its own released juices, as well as to absorb more thoroughly the aromas of the court bouillon. Classic French cookbooks, such as Escoffier's, warn that immersion in boiling court bouillon may cause a rapid shrinking and bursting of the flesh. You won't have this problem with salmon; nevertheless, keep this in mind when poaching more delicate types of fish.

A whole fish is cooked when it reaches 130° at its thickest point. The best way to test the fish without a lot of poking and prodding is to use an instant-read thermometer. The fish should be removed right away to avoid overcooking. Now is when I add the wine to the broth. This keeps the wine much fresher tasting and reduces the temperature of the court bouillon, bringing it closer to the point when the fish may be replaced and stored.

#### Whole Poached Salmon with Sauce Verte

You can use smaller Coho salmon to make this dish, if you like; they usually weigh about three pounds. Just be sure to adjust the amount of the court bouillon and the sauce verte as well. Serves 12 to 15.

**1 whole unscaled salmon (about 6 lb.), wrapped in cheesecloth and tied with string**  
**12 qt. water**  
**1½ cups kosher salt**  
**3 carrots (½ lb. total), sliced thin**  
**1 large leek (about ½ lb.), sliced thin**  
**6 bay leaves**  
**1 bunch thyme**  
**1 bottle dry white wine**

**FOR THE SAUCE VERTE:**  
**1 bunch fresh spinach (about 5 oz.), trimmed and washed**  
**2 egg yolks**  
**2 cups canola or vegetable oil**  
**1½ tsp. kosher salt**  
**1½ tsp. Champagne vinegar**  
**Fresh fine-ground black pepper**  
**2 Tbs. minced chives**  
**1 Tbs. minced fresh tarragon or basil**  
**1 Tbs. minced parsley**  
**2 Tbs. capers, drained and chopped**

**To poach the salmon**—Choose a pot big enough to hold the fish and fit it with a rack. Set the salmon on the rack. Add the water, salt, vegetables, and herbs. *Do not add the wine.* Over medium heat, bring the court bouillon to just below simmering (180°F). Keep it at this temperature until the salmon reaches 130° at its thickest point, about 30 min. Transfer the salmon to a large plate or tray. Add the wine to the court bouillon and let cool to tepid. Return the salmon to the cooled court bouillon and refrigerate overnight.

**To make the sauce verte**—In a large pot of boiling water, cook the spinach for 2 min. Drain and rinse the spinach with cold water. Squeeze the leaves to remove as much water as possible and chop the spinach very fine.

## A whole salmon needs careful dressing



**1** Make a shallow incision around the gill cover, just in front of the tail, and all along the dorsal line from tail to head. Pull away any fins.



**2** Lift away the skin, taking care not to pull off any of the flesh. Leave the skin intact on the underside, but trim any ragged edges.



**3** The grayish brown flesh just beneath the skin is perfectly edible, but the salmon will look more appetizing without it. Gently scrape it away.



*Whole poached salmon makes a striking presentation. For the most flavorful fish, serve the salmon slightly cool rather than cold, straight from the refrigerator.*

Put the egg yolks in a 1-qt. bowl and whisk to combine. Whisk in the oil very slowly in droplets, until the mixture begins to thicken. Add the remaining oil in a thin stream until it's well incorporated into the yolks. Add the salt, vinegar, and pepper to taste. Whisk in the spinach, herbs, and capers. The sauce should be soft but firm enough to hold its shape on the plate. If it's too thick, whisk in water, 1 Tbs. at a time, until thinned. Refrigerate the sauce verte at least 1 hour so the flavors can develop.

Remove the fish from the cold court bouillon and set it on a large plate or tray. Remove the cheesecloth and reserve it with the court bouillon. Remove the skin (see instructions opposite). You may do this well ahead of time. If so, moisten the cheesecloth with the court bouillon and cover the fish. Discard the court bouillon.

To serve, transfer the salmon to a large platter. Garnish with sprigs of watercress (or some of the same herbs used in the sauce verte) and slices of lemon.



*Remove the bones all at once after serving one side of the fish by simply lifting from the tail. Check the bottom fillet for any small bones you might have missed.*

### Salmon with Summer Vegetables

Tossing the vegetables with salt and leaving them to stand until they release their water concentrates their flavors. Serves four to six.

#### FOR THE COURT BOUILLON:

- 4½ tsp. olive oil
- 1 small onion, sliced
- 1 large carrot, sliced
- 1 rib celery, with leaves, sliced
- 1 small bunch fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 qt. water
- ¼ cup kosher salt
- 2 cups dry white wine

1¼ lb. salmon fillet from the meaty head section of the fish, (about 1 inch thick at its thickest part), skinned, bones pulled

#### FOR THE VEGETABLES:

- 4 medium ripe tomatoes, cut in wedges
- 2 fresh Anaheim chile peppers, cored, seeded, and sliced thin
- ½ large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and sliced thin
- 1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and sliced thin
- 4 scallions, white part only, minced
- 1 small shallot, sliced thin
- 1 medium bulb fennel, cored and sliced thin lengthwise
- 1 Tbs. kosher salt

#### FOR THE DRESSING:

- 2 cloves garlic
- 12 anchovy fillets
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 Tbs. red-wine vinegar
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

(Ingredient list continues)



*Fresh, ripe tomatoes and niçoise olives bring a pleasing acidity to this Sliced Salmon Salad, countering the richness of the fish. Blanched watercress dressed with lemon and olive oil is surprisingly delicious.*

**FOR GARNISH AND PRESENTATION:**

12 to 15 fresh basil leaves

Freshly ground black pepper

4 handfuls arugula or mesclun salad

2 eggs, covered with cold water, brought to a boil, covered with a lid, removed from the heat and left to stand for 8 min.; cooled under cold water, peeled, and cut into wedges

**To poach the fish**—In a heavy-based pan, warm the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion, carrot, celery, thyme, and bay leaves; cook until they release their perfume, 8 to 10 min. Add the water and salt, bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook 12 to 15 min. Add the wine. Bring the court bouillon just below the simmering point (180°F), and add the salmon. The fish should be entirely submerged; if not, add a little more water. Poach the fish for about 10 min. and then remove it from the court bouillon. Cut a slit in the salmon at its thickest point—it should be moist and a deep pink, but not rare. Bear in mind that the salmon will continue to cook slightly even after it has been removed from the bouillon. Transfer the salmon to a plate to cool. If time permits, poach the salmon several hours ahead, return it to the cooled court bouillon, and refriger-

ate. Remove from the refrigerator about 1½ hours before serving for the best flavor.

**To prepare the vegetables**—In a large bowl, mix the vegetables and salt. Cover and let stand at room temperature for 1½ hours. Transfer to a colander and drain well, pressing down slightly to extract as much water as possible. Cover the vegetables and refrigerate until ready to use.

**To make the dressing**—With a mortar and pestle, pound the garlic. Add the anchovies and continue pounding until reduced to a paste. (Alternatively, mince the garlic and anchovies with a knife and use the side of the blade to smash them into a paste.) Transfer the paste to a small bowl, add the lemon juice and vinegar, and whisk in the oil.

**To garnish and serve**—Tear the basil leaves and add them to the salted vegetables. Add about half the dressing to these vegetables, season to taste with pepper, and mix well. Break the salmon into chunks and season with about 2 Tbs. of the dressing. Dress the arugula or mesclun salad with what remains.

On a large platter, arrange the vegetables and top with the fish. Put the greens around the vegetables and garnish with the eggs.



*Evenly cut slices ensure evenly cooked fish. These bias-cut slices cook in only two minutes.*

### Sliced Salmon Salad

Poaching in the simplest of bouillons—salted water with bay leaf—accents the taste of the fish but does nothing to alter its essential flavor. Serves four.

1 salmon fillet, about 1 lb.

1 qt. water

2 Tbs. kosher salt

2 bay leaves

#### FOR THE TOMATO-OLIVE GARNISH:

4 small ripe tomatoes (about ¾ lb. total), peeled, seeded, and diced

½ cup pitted niçoise or other black olives

1 small shallot, minced

2 tsp. red-wine vinegar or lemon juice

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley

#### FOR THE WATERCRESS SALAD:

2 bunches fresh, tender watercress (about 10 oz.)

1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

1 tsp. fresh lemon juice

**To poach the fish**—Cut the fillet in half lengthwise to yield two roughly rectangular pieces about 6 inches long and 2½ inches wide. Remove any pin bones. Turn the fish so that the long side is in front of you and cut ¾-inch-thick slices on the bias.

In a large frying pan, bring the water, salt, and bay leaves to a boil over high heat. Add the fish and poach for 2 min. Remove with a slotted spatula and set it on a plate lined with paper towels. Let stand at room temperature.

**To make the tomato-olive garnish**—Combine the tomatoes, olives, shallot, vinegar, and olive oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in the chopped parsley.

**To make the watercress salad**—In a large pot of boiling water, blanch the watercress. Refresh it under cold water and pat dry. Toss with the olive oil and lemon juice and season to taste with more salt and pepper.

On a platter or plates, arrange a bed of watercress, lay the salmon on top, and spoon the tomato-olive mixture over all.

*Paul Bertolli is the chef/co-owner of Oliveto Restaurant in Berkeley, California, and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.* ♦

# Drying Your Garden's Harvest

Turn summer's crop into colorful condiments for year-round use

BY JANE SELOVER

**E**very gardener is thrilled by an abundant harvest, but having a green thumb has its downside, too. What do you do with the surplus of lush fruits, fresh vegetables, and fragrant herbs? You do some easy and creative preserving by drying. That's what I do in my job at the food and wine center of a California winery, where we have a five-acre organic garden. My summer days are spent finding ways to transform the great stuff from our garden into delicious, attractive, and interesting ingredients.



*Even size and lots of air are key to good drying. Here, fig wedges on a mesh drying rack have plenty of room for air circulation.*

We dry everything from delicate day lilies, which we grind to a powder for decorating dessert plates, to big, fat Georgia Streak heirloom tomatoes, which we slice and dry until they're a leathery and incredibly sweet snack.

## LOSING WATER THROUGH DRYING MEANS GAINING FLAVOR AND SHELF LIFE

Drying produces an amazing transformation in fresh fruits and vegetables. Colors deepen, textures get chewy (and sometimes brittle), and flavors become intense and perfumy. The goal in drying is to remove enough water so that the environment becomes hostile to bacteria. Since many fruits are high in sugar and acid, partial dehydration will be enough to preserve them well. Lower-acid foods, like most vegetables, need complete dehydration.

## DRY OUTDOORS, INDOORS, OR IN YOUR OVEN

Your simplest choice of equipment is a nylon mesh screen set on a trestle in the full sun. The disadvantage of this method, however, is that your produce is subject to the whimsy of the weather, insects, and dust.

I do a lot of volume drying (my staff and I dried 200 pounds of just three varieties of tomatoes last summer), so I use a large dehydrator with spacious racks and a fan; it keeps the temperature constant and the air moving. You can use a small electric



*The shapes and colors of dried fruits can be as appealing as their flavors. Sliced persimmons display a star center, and figs show delicate shades of green.*

dehydrator, designed for home use, usually built with about a half-dozen racks (see sources at right). Granted, if you're trying to keep up with a bumper crop of tomatoes you might fall behind, since drying does take time.

You can also use your oven, but only if you can regulate the heat to very low. Too much heat can cause the ingredient to dry hard on the outside but still be moist on the inside, which can easily lead to spoilage.

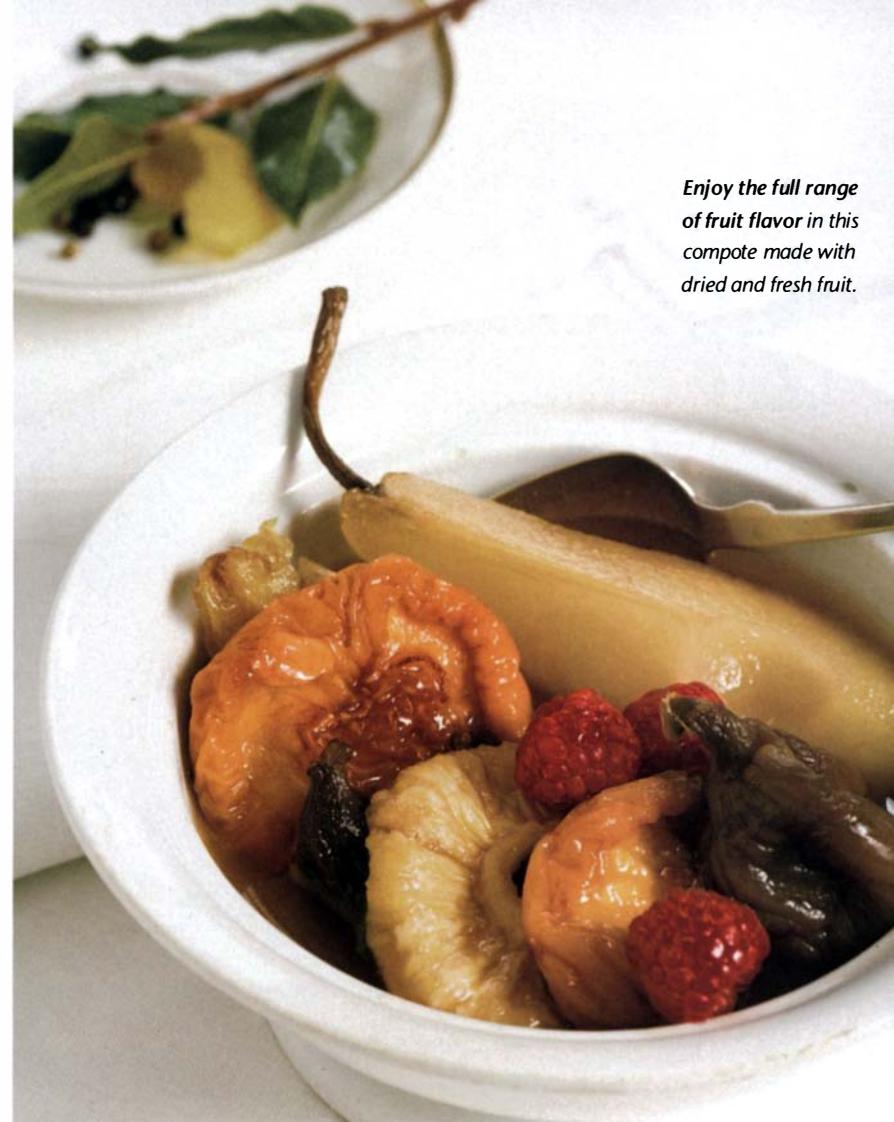
#### THE METHOD IS READY, SET...WAIT

Start with only the most perfect, ripe ingredients; drying will intensify flavor, but not enough to make dull fruit delicious. First, rinse and dry the ingredient. In most cases, you'll want to halve small items or slice larger ones about  $\frac{1}{3}$  inch thick to speed drying and avoid mushy spots. Space the pieces generously on your drying rack and set it outside, in your dehydrator, or in the oven. Now wait.

The timing varies depending on the temperature and humidity outdoors, your choice of equipment, and the water content of the ingredients. Sliced tomatoes dried outdoors, for example, may take between three and five days in dry, partly sunny weather. In a home electric dehydrator, tomatoes will be leathery in eight to twelve hours. The best recipe is experimentation. Get a good reference book (see sources at right), read up, and then get to know the quirks of your specific conditions.

**Dry until chewy or crisp.** The degree of dryness you need is also a function of what you plan to do with the ingredients. For items to eat out of hand as a snack, you want the ingredient to be dry enough to prevent decay but moist enough to have a good chewy texture. If you plan to grind your item into powder or to rehydrate it to use in cooked dishes, you should dry it until crisp, which will ensure a longer shelf life.

**Preserve your preserves with careful storage.** How you're going to store your produce depends in part on how successful you were with drying it. The super-dry items can be stored at room temperature in a jar or a plastic bag, protected from light and dust. Partially dry items, like tomatoes or pears, should be stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator or freezer just to be sure bacteria doesn't grow in the remaining moisture. Dried foods are so collapsed that they don't take up much room, and this way you won't have any unhappy surprises when you open the cupboard to use some of your precious stock of dried persimmons. Storing dried ingredients in oil is a good technique, too, because the oil acts as a preservative and the dried ingredient flavors the oil, but for safety's sake, keep these products refrigerated.



*Enjoy the full range of fruit flavor in this compote made with dried and fresh fruit.*

#### Fresh & Dried Fruit Compote

This recipe is from John Ash, head of Fetzer's Food & Wine Center. Try to include figs, pears, and peaches in the dried fruit mix. If your dried fruit pieces are too big, cut them into manageable chunks. This compote is incredible served barely warm with a spoonful of yogurt cheese or mascarpone. *Yields about 1 quart.*

**1 bottle dry white wine**  
**2 Tbs. lemon juice**  
**1/2 cup sugar**  
**1 cinnamon stick, 4 inches long**  
**1 bay leaf**  
**1 1/2 tsp. coriander seeds, lightly crushed**  
**1 tsp. whole black peppercorns**  
**1/2 lb. mixed dried fruit**  
**2 Tbs. dry sherry**  
**2 tsp. chopped candied ginger**  
**1 lb. fresh firm, ripe pears or apples (or a mix), peeled, cored, and cut in thick wedges**  
**2-inch strip pared lemon zest**  
**3/4 cup fresh blueberries, raspberries, or cherries (or a mix)**

In a nonaluminum pan, simmer the wine, lemon juice, sugar, cinnamon, bay leaf, coriander seeds, and peppercorns for 15 min., covered. Strain, return to the pan, and add the dried fruit, sherry, and ginger. Simmer, covered, another 10 min. Add the pears or apples and zest, simmer until just tender, 3 to 5 min., and then cool. Carefully stir in the berries. Store, refrigerated, for up to 10 days.

#### SOURCES FOR DEHYDRATORS

**Chef's Catalog,**  
3215 Commercial Ave., Northbrook, IL  
60026-1900;  
800/338-3232

**Fante's,**  
1006 S. 9th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147;  
800/878-5557

**Real Goods,**  
555 Leslie St., Ukiah, CA 95482-5507;  
800/762-7325

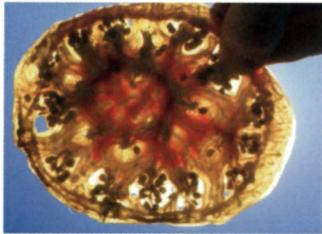
**BOOKS**  
*Putting Food By*,  
by Janet Greene, et al., Viking Press, 1988.

*Fancy Pantry*,  
by Helen Witty, Workman Press, 1986.

*Stocking Up (3rd ed.)*,  
by Carol Hupping, S&S Trade, 1990.

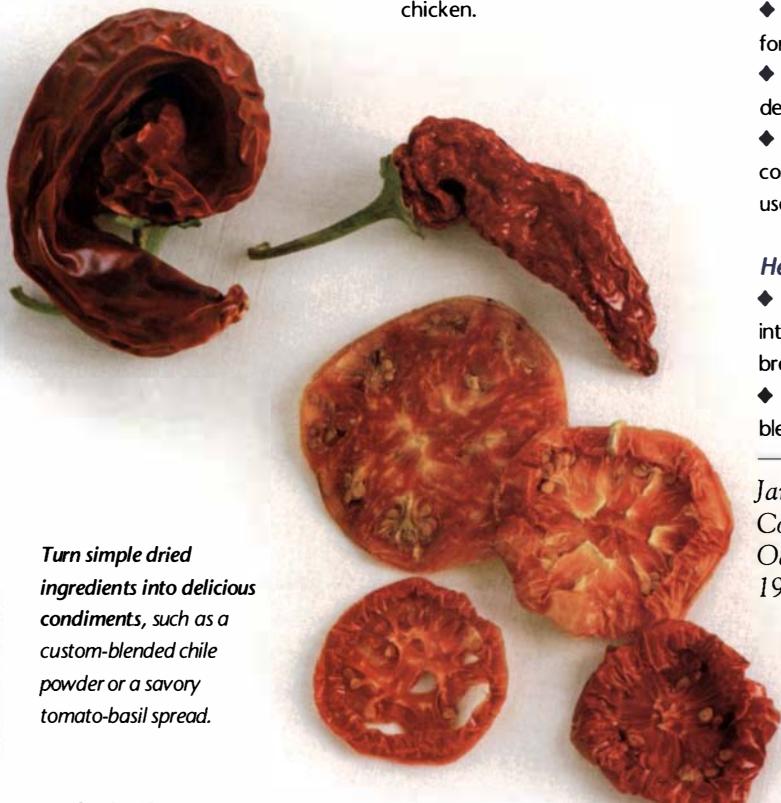
# Get creative with dried fruits, herbs, and vegetables

Once you're comfortable with the basic technique, you can make some wonderful condiments to use in your own cooking or to give as gifts.



## Tomatoes:

- ◆ Dry until still pliable and eat as a snack just by the slice.
- ◆ Pack dried slices in a clean glass jar, fill it with olive oil, and add a few sprigs of herbs and a few roasted garlic cloves; store in the refrigerator until needed. Use the oil-soaked dried tomatoes whole or cut-up on pastas, pizzas, and salads.
- ◆ Chop pliable or rehydrated tomatoes and add as a boost to bread doughs, vinaigrettes, sauces, or pilafs.



Turn simple dried ingredients into delicious condiments, such as a custom-blended chile powder or a savory tomato-basil spread.

- ◆ Purée softened tomatoes with herbs such as basil and oregano and a little olive oil to make a spread.

## Chiles:

- ◆ String into a wreath or a graceful hanging *ristra*.
- ◆ Rehydrate to use in *moles* and other spicy dishes.
- ◆ Grind into custom chile powders
- ◆ Add to bottles of oil or vinegar to infuse.

## Mushrooms:

- ◆ Rehydrate to use, whole or sliced, in soups, stews, stir-fries, or pastas.
- ◆ Infuse in water or stock to make a flavorful broth.
- ◆ Rehydrate, mince, and blend with butter to top grilled fish or chicken.



Use the subtle beauty of dried and powdered flowers as a plate decoration. Red and pink rose petals and golden day lilies are pictured here.

## Edible flowers:

- ◆ Use whole roses as decoration for dessert plates, even salads.
- ◆ Grind into colorful powder to decorate plates (see above).
- ◆ Store with sugar in a sealed container to perfume the sugar for use in pastries.

## Herbs:

- ◆ Dry whole leaves to crumble into any type of recipe, especially bread doughs.
- ◆ Dry leaves to make custom blends and herb rubs.

## Fruit:

- ◆ Eat whole or sliced as a healthy snack.
- ◆ Use as an accent in a variety of dishes—blend with fresh cheese, toss in chicken salads, add to stuffings for poultry and meat, accent ice creams and other desserts.
- ◆ Poach in spiced syrup to make a compote (see recipe opposite).
- ◆ Purée, spread in a thin layer, and make fruit leathers, with either a single type of fruit or a combination.

Jane Selover traded New York City for California's Mendocino County a few years before she began work at Fetzer Valley Oaks Food & Wine Center in 1990, first as a cook and, since 1993, as head of the drying and preserving program. ♦

# Classic Slow-Cooked Tomato Sauce

For a thick, old-fashioned sauce with an intense tomato flavor, there's no substitute for time

BY ELAYNE ROBERTSON DEMBY

Proust had his madeleine, a bite of which brought back a flood of childhood memories. For me, it's tomato sauce. The aroma of it takes me back to my childhood, when it seemed there was always a pot of my grandmother's sauce simmering on the stove. Like my parents and grandparents and their parents before them, I have never bought tomato sauce in a jar. Instead, every year at summer's end, when my garden is overflowing with ripe tomatoes, I make as much sauce as I can and fill my house with the unmistakable perfume of tomatoes cooking on the stove.

## WHY SLOW-COOK?

Many people disparage long-cooked tomato sauces in favor of quicker-cooking recipes, arguing that the sauce tastes fresher if the tomatoes aren't overcooked. But the two styles aren't mutually exclusive. Quick-cooked and slow-cooked tomato sauces are distinctly different, and each should be savored on its own terms. Like sun-dried or roasted tomatoes,

slow-cooked tomato sauces have a deep, concentrated flavor. Long hours of cooking enhance the tomatoes' natural sugar and allow their water to evaporate, leaving behind a thick sauce with an intense tomato flavor.

## THE FRESHEST INGREDIENTS FOR THE BEST-TASTING SAUCE

Don't bother to make sauce from fresh tomatoes unless they're perfectly ripe and fresh from the vine. Supermarket tomatoes are flavorless and bland, and a sauce made from them will taste the same. Traditionally, plum tomatoes are used for making sauce. Sometimes called "sauce tomatoes," they have a higher proportion of flesh to seed and are less watery, more meaty than regular slicing tomatoes. Because plum tomatoes have relatively few seeds, I never bother to seed them. Of course, if you have a surplus of ripe slicing tomatoes from your garden, by all means use them for sauce. Just be sure to remove all their seeds, or your sauce will be watery and bitter.

## A cast-iron or aluminum saucepot is best

In many Italian American families, one pot was traditionally set aside for the exclusive purpose of making sauce. Popular lore had it that over time the pot became "seasoned," making for a better sauce. Nothing but tomato sauce could be made in the pot or the

seasoning would be ruined. The pot had to be washed with great care so that hard-earned seasoning wasn't scrubbed away. My relatives' saucepots were always heavyweight aluminum or cast iron with an enamel lining. Years ago I found out why.

My first "good" pots were stainless steel with copper bottoms. Every time I made tomato sauce, I found a scorched crust on the bottom of the pot. Since I acquired an enameled cast-iron pot, I haven't scorched a batch.

Cast iron and aluminum distribute heat evenly, keeping the sauce from burning during the long cooking process. Stainless steel's inferior heat-conducting properties don't stand up to long hours on the stove.



**When using fresh tomatoes, the first step is to remove their skins.** Tomato skins are tough and, if left intact, can make your sauce unattractive as well as unpleasant to eat. If you have a food mill, simply pass the tomatoes through it. The mill will trap the skins and seeds and purée the pulp beautifully. Otherwise, see the instructions for peeling and seeding on p. 46. After the tomatoes are peeled, chop them coarse before puréeing them in a blender or food processor.

**If your tomatoes are less than perfect, use tomatoes from a can.** There are many brands of canned tomatoes, but they're not all created equal.

Plum tomatoes imported from Italy are not necessarily superior to domestic brands. Experiment to see which you prefer. Don't use canned puréed tomatoes: they'll change the taste of your sauce for the worse. Buy canned whole tomatoes, drain off some of the liquid, and purée them yourself. I use an immersion blender to purée the tomatoes right in the can.

Your onions and garlic should be fresh, too. Don't substitute dehydrated onion flakes or jarred minced garlic. If the garlic is old and pithy, remove the green core, which can make your sauce taste bitter.

*Peak-of-the-season tomatoes make the best sauce, but with good-quality canned tomatoes, you can make great sauce all year round.*

Use a good olive oil, but not extra-virgin. The flavor of expensive, first-pressed oil is lost when heated.

#### FOR HERBS, FRESH ISN'T NECESSARILY BEST

In my family, tomato sauce was always made with dried herbs. Unless I'm making a sauce where all the ingredients come from the garden, I prefer dried herbs, both because it's traditional and because, to my taste, dried herbs give the sauce better flavor.

(Parsley is an exception, however; fresh parsley is always best.) Regardless of the season, I always use dried oregano. Its flavor is just too pallid when fresh.

I find many store-bought "fresh" herbs actually taste rather bland. The longer they're away from the garden, the more their flavor fades. Smell your herbs, fresh or dried, before you use them. A strong aroma hints at a strong flavor. Dried herbs that have been kept on the shelf for longer than a year have probably lost their potency. Date bottles and throw out any that are older than one year.

If you use dried herbs, add them at the beginning of the cooking process so their flavors can soften and perfume the sauce. The taste of fresh herbs is more fragile. Stir them in just before you remove the sauce from the stove, as cooking diminishes their flavor.

#### SLOW SIMMERING: THE SECRET TO THE SAUCE

Time is the key to a flavorful tomato sauce, and this applies to sautéing the onions as well. Cook the onions slowly over low heat and they'll be mild and sweet, a delicate complement to your sauce. Sautéed quickly over medium-high heat, the onions will have a more robust flavor and so will your tomato

sauce. But take care not to let the onion or garlic burn. Sauté the onion first; then add the garlic and cook just until it releases its aroma before adding the remaining ingredients.

Cook the sauce at a constant simmer—never let it boil. If your sauce insists on boiling no matter how low the heat, remove the pot from the stove and let it cool for 15 to 20 minutes before continuing the cooking.

**A sweeter sauce.** There are three schools of thought on the acid balance of tomato sauce. Some people like an acidic-tasting sauce, while others like a sweet sauce with no trace of acidity. A third group seeks a balance between the two extremes.

Jarred sauces in this country tend to be sweet; any acidity is cut by copious amounts of corn syrup. Home cooks who like a sweet tomato sauce can add sugar to theirs. Since personal taste varies widely and so does the acidity of tomatoes (even between batches of the same canned variety), there is no exact amount of sugar to add. Taste your sauce when it has finished cooking. If you find it too acidic, add sugar, one teaspoon at a time, until the flavor suits your taste.

Determining just when the sauce has finished cooking is again a matter of taste. When you're happy with the flavor and consistency, consider it done. I cook my sauce until it's quite thick and reduced by at least one-third of its original volume; this can take 2½, sometimes 3½ hours. And of course the sauce freezes wonderfully, with little loss of flavor. The recipe is so simple that I make as much as I can when tomatoes are at their peak. A freezer full of fresh tomato sauce helps me make it through the winter.

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Elayne Robertson Demby, a food writer in Weston, Connecticut, is a new mother who's preparing to pass on her tomato sauce recipe to another generation.

## Always smell herbs, fresh or dried, before you use them. A strong aroma hints at a strong flavor.

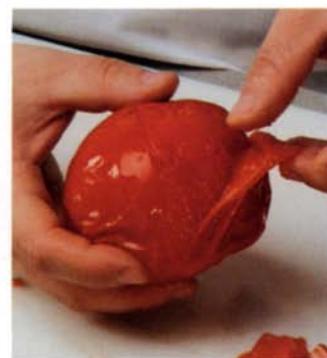
## Peeling and seeding tomatoes



**1 Coring.** The first step in peeling tomatoes is to remove the cores and score an X in the bottom of each one.



**2 Blanching.** Plunge the tomatoes into boiling water. When the skins start to pull away, they're ready to peel.



**3 Peeling.** Transfer the tomatoes to a cold-water bath to stop the cooking; then simply peel away the skins.



**4 Seeding.** Halve the tomatoes and gently squeeze out the seeds. Coax out remaining seeds with your fingers.

# Try the classic sauce, pure and simple, or one of a trio of variations

Slow-cooked tomato sauce is delicious served on top of pasta without any adornment other than a dose of freshly grated Romano cheese, but it's also a terrific base for making other classic tomato sauces.

All these variations make enough sauce for about 1½ pounds of pasta, enough to serve about eight people.

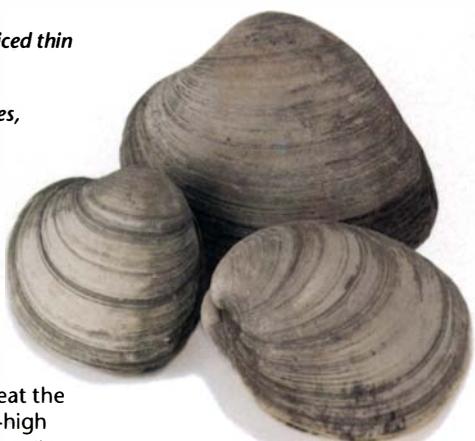
## Classic Fresh Tomato Sauce (*Salsa di Pomodoro Fresco*)

Feelings about tomato sauce run strong among Neapolitans. I'm sure it would be impossible to find two who agree on the recipe. My recipe is much like the one I learned from my grandmother, although I've adjusted it over the years to suit my own taste and style of cooking. *Yields 1 quart.*

**3 Tbs. olive oil**  
**1 small yellow onion, sliced thin**  
**3 cloves garlic, minced**  
**¼ cup red wine**  
**3 lb. fresh plum tomatoes, peeled and puréed (about 6 cups purée)**  
**2 tsp. dried oregano**  
**Salt**  
**3 Tbs. minced fresh basil**  
**¼ cup minced fresh parsley**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**

In a large saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Sauté the onion until it begins to wilt, about 5 min. Add the garlic and sauté just until fragrant. Stir in the wine. Add the tomatoes, oregano, and ¼ tsp. salt.

Bring the sauce to a simmer, reduce the heat to low, and let cook until reduced by at least one-third, 2½ to 3½ hours. Stir occasionally, taking care that the sauce never boils. Stir in the basil and parsley. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper as needed.



## Red Clam Sauce

For a variation on the variation, add ¼ cup drained capers at the same time you add the clams.

**1 qt. Classic Fresh Tomato Sauce (see recipe at left)**  
**4 lb. fresh littleneck clams (about 30 clams), rinsed well**

In a large saucepan, bring the tomato sauce to a simmer. Add the clams, cover, and cook just until the clams open their shells, 5 to 10 min.



## Puttanesca-Style Sauce

Though the real *puttanesca* is actually a fast-cooking sauce, I like to make this version when I have some of my slow-cooked sauce in the freezer.

**3 Tbs. olive oil**  
**5 anchovy fillets, rinsed and chopped**  
**1 qt. Classic Fresh Tomato Sauce (see recipe at left)**  
**½ cup drained capers**  
**½ cup pitted, chopped black olives**  
**½ tsp. red pepper flakes, more to taste**

In a large frying pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the anchovy fillets and cook, stirring, until they begin to dissolve. Add the tomato sauce and bring to a simmer. Stir in the capers, olives, and red pepper flakes and cook until heated through, 2 to 3 min.



## Tomato Sauce With Dried Porcinis

Try serving this rich sauce over a mound of creamy polenta.

**2 oz. dried porcini mushrooms**  
**1 qt. Classic Fresh Tomato Sauce (see recipe at left)**

Cover the mushrooms with 2 cups warm water and let soak until softened, about 45 min. Drain the mushrooms, reserving ⅓ cup of the mushroom soaking water. Gently squeeze the mushrooms dry and chop them. Strain the reserved soaking liquid through a coffee filter.

In a large saucepan, combine the mushrooms, reserved mushroom liquid, and the tomato sauce. Bring to a simmer and let cook until thick and not at all watery, 15 to 25 min. ♦

# Mix Flavors and Textures in Triple-Layered Dessert Bars



Dessert bars have a refined appeal when you cut them into precise, delicate squares. The chocolate cream cheese brownie (foreground) is topped with a shiny glaze. The chocolate nut bar is rich with almonds and walnuts.

These easy confections can be elegant, too

BY PATRICIA ANN HEYMAN

**D**essert bars are my culinary lifesavers. As a pastry chef, I've been rescued many times by the stash I keep hidden away in my freezer, such as the day when a catering manager lost a reservation for a luncheon. I had only an hour to prepare dessert before the guests arrived; fortunately, I had my trusty parachute of dessert bars waiting in the freezer. While the cooks raced around the kitchen in a panic, I just arranged the bars into an elegant dessert buffet.

Preparing dessert bars is like making cookies, only quicker, because you don't need to roll, spoon, or pipe each cookie separately. The ingredients are combined, spread into a pan, baked, and then cut. Although many cooks dismiss the dessert bar as too simple, I seek to elevate it to new heights. I've prepared dessert bars both for elegant parties and for casual affairs when a quick, fork-free dessert was needed. At home, these bars allow me to offer my guests a choice of three or four different desserts without having to spend a whole day baking.

## LAYERS ADD DRAMA

Dessert bars are not only delicious and easy to make, but they're great looking, too. I like bars that have several different elements of flavor and texture. For example, my brownie recipe (opposite) has a layer of chocolate cream cheese sandwiched between the more cakelike layers, with a thin coating of chocolate smoothed on top. The chocolate nut bars have a rich, buttery bottom crust with a topping of toasted nuts and chocolate. When cut into squares, these bars have

a tricolored cross section—light brown on the bottom, dark brown in the middle, and a rich golden brown on top. It's an eye-catching cookie.

## ORDINARY INGREDIENTS MAKE EXTRAORDINARY BARS

You probably already have all the ingredients you'll need to make an array of impressive dessert bars. All-purpose flour, sugar, and eggs form the foundation of most dessert bars. Whether you use butter, margarine, or shortening is really a matter of personal preference. Although I prefer butter, you can get away with margarine or shortening in the chocolate cream cheese brownies because the other rich ingredients will mask the delicate flavor of butter somewhat. But in a simpler recipe like my raspberry bars, butter is an important flavor component—one that would be conspicuously absent if margarine or shortening were substituted.

## SIMPLE EQUIPMENT, SIMPLE TECHNIQUE

Dessert bars require very little equipment. A mixer makes creaming butter and sugar much easier. I use a food processor to quickly cut butter into a flour mixture, but a pastry cutter or two knives will work just as well. You'll also need baking pans, and most recipes can be easily adjusted to fit any size pan that you have.

**The creaming method.** Even if you don't bake frequently, you've probably followed a recipe that begins with directions to "cream the sugar and butter together." This simply means to beat them until they look fluffy. It's best to start with room-temperature butter so that it mixes easily with the sugar. Beat until the mixture is smooth, pale yellow, and the sugar granules are no longer obvious. Once this happens, you can slowly add eggs and liquids, and then the dry ingredients. Nuts or chocolate should be added at the very end. Always remember to mix the dry ingredients just until they're absorbed. Too much mixing after the flour is added can result in tough bars.

## CUTTING THE BARS REQUIRES PRECISION

After the baked bars have cooled, they're ready to be cut. A neat, precise cutting job will ensure that your bars look as good as they taste. Take your time; the results will be worth it.

Decide how you'll divide the bars and mark them before cutting. For instance, to divide a 9x13-inch pan into "bite-and-a-half" sized squares, I first measure out eight evenly spaced notches along the long edge of the pan. Then I notch the shorter side with six evenly spaced marks. You can use a ruler, or you can simply make a mark at the center of the 13-inch side, divide each half into quarters, and again into eighths. Likewise, divide the 9-inch side into equal thirds and then into sixths. With this grid as your guide, you're ready to cut. Using this method, a 9x13-inch pan yields 48 dainty desserts—enough for about 20 guests.

A chef's knife is all you need to cut the bars neatly, but if it pulls or rips the bars, try a serrated knife. Always wipe the knife clean between cuts. If the bars are frosted or are gooey inside, chill the pan before cutting. The frosting should be cool enough so it doesn't cling to the knife, but not cold, or it will crack when sliced.

**Freezing for freshness.** I prefer to pack my dessert bars into clean cookie tins and serve them within a day, but if you don't plan to serve them right away, it's best to freeze them. Almost any carefully wrapped dessert bar will freeze well. Simply layer the bars with plastic wrap when arranging them in the tins. (Foil pans will also work well.) The tin protects the bars from being smashed in the freezer, and the plastic helps keep the bars from sticking together.

To create a presentation of dessert bars, I arrange them on platters while they're still frozen. They're much easier to arrange when frozen, and I can do this hours before a party begins. Bars can be stacked if they aren't sticky or frosted. I often create a pyramid on the platter and then fill the rest of the platter with concentric circles of bars in a single layer. This adds some height and variety to the display. If you're aware of the color and textural differences, you can use a variety of bars to create a beautiful and interesting platter.

## Chocolate Cream Cheese Brownies

With three different chocolate layers, these brownies are intense. The cocoa in them beckons for tall glasses of milk. *Yields about 48 bars.*

### FOR THE FILLING:

4 oz. (1 cup) chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate or  
chocolate chips  
1/4 cup heavy cream  
1/2 lb. cream cheese, room temperature  
1 egg  
2 tsp. flour

### FOR THE BROWNIE BATTER:

9 oz. (18 Tbs.) unsalted butter, room temperature; more for  
buttering the pan  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
5 eggs  
1 tsp. vanilla extract  
1/8 tsp. almond extract  
7 oz. (1 1/2 cups) all-purpose flour  
2 2/3 oz. (3/4 cup) unsweetened cocoa powder  
1/4 tsp. baking powder

### FOR THE ICING:

Approximately 8 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate,  
finely chopped (about 2 cups)

**For the filling**—Slowly melt half the chopped chocolate and cream together in a microwave or a double boiler. Set aside to cool. In an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the cream cheese and egg together until fluffy. Add the cooled chocolate mixture and mix well. Add the flour and the remaining chocolate and mix until incorporated. Chill the filling while you assemble the brownie batter.

**For the brownie batter**—Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9x13-inch pan (a standard Pyrex baking dish). Cream the butter and sugar in an electric mixer until fluffy. Add



*Cream cheese adds tang to chocolate in this filling for super-dense chocolate brownies.*



*Instant icing.*  
*Immediately after removing the brownies from the oven, the author covers them with finely chopped chocolate. After a few minutes, the chocolate is melted and ready to spread.*

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL DESSERT BARS

- ◆ Always use room-temperature butter when creaming with sugar.
- ◆ Don't overmix the batter. After the flour has been added, mix only to incorporate—too much mixing means tough bars.
- ◆ Wait until the very end of the mixing process to add nuts and chocolate; this way, they'll be distributed more evenly throughout the bars.
- ◆ Take your time when cutting the bars. Use a serrated knife and wipe it clean between each cut.

the eggs one at a time, making sure that each one is fully incorporated before adding another. Occasionally scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the vanilla and almond extracts. Sift together the flour, cocoa, and baking powder and gently blend them into the batter.

**To assemble**—Using an offset metal spatula (like the one pictured at right), spread half the brownie batter into the prepared pan. Spread the filling over the batter. Spoon the remaining brownie batter over the filling and gently spread it into an even layer. Bake for 35 min., until a knife inserted into the center of the brownies comes out clean.

**For the icing**—As soon as you remove the brownies from the oven, sprinkle about three-quarters of the chocolate on top. Let sit about 5 min., until the chocolate has melted. Gently spread the soft chocolate into a thin, smooth layer. If it isn't enough chocolate, sprinkle a few more pieces on top and spread again, but be careful not to make the icing too thick.

### Raspberry Bars

The better the preserves you use, the better these bars will be. I like to use raspberry because it gives the bars lots of color as well as flavor, but you could use apricot preserves or even a bitter-orange marmalade. *Yields about 48 bars.*

**13 oz. (26 Tbs.) unsalted butter, room temperature  
1½ cups sugar  
2 eggs  
1 lb. (3¾ cups) all-purpose flour  
7½ oz. (1½ cups) chopped, toasted hazelnuts  
2 cups raspberry preserves**

Heat the oven to 350°. Butter a 9x13-inch pan. In an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add the flour and mix just enough to incorporate. Add the nuts and mix a little longer until just blended.

Press about two-thirds of the mixture into the prepared pan. Spread with the raspberry preserves and then crumble the remaining dough on top. Bake for about 1 hour, until the top is lightly browned.

### Chocolate Nut Bars

As these bars bake, the chocolate in the topping bonds with the base, leaving three layers in the finished bars. This recipe works with any variety of nut. I like to use almonds and walnuts; hazelnuts are delicious, too. *Yields about 48 bars.*

#### FOR THE BASE:

**11 oz. (2½ cups) all-purpose flour  
½ cup sugar  
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter  
3 oz. (¾ cup) blanched, sliced, and toasted almonds**

#### FOR THE TOPPING:

**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, room temperature  
8 oz. (1 packed cup) brown sugar  
2 eggs  
1½ tsp. vanilla extract or 4½ tsp. bourbon  
¼ cup all-purpose flour  
½ tsp. salt  
6 oz. (1½ cups) chopped bittersweet chocolate or chocolate chips  
6 oz. (1½ cups) chopped, toasted walnuts**

**For the base**—Heat the oven to 350°. Butter a 9x13-inch baking dish. In a food processor, combine the flour and



*Wet hands keep the dough from sticking. Here the author lays the foundation for a pan of buttery raspberry bars.*



*Making dessert bars is as easy as spreading jam. When baked, these bars will have a colorful raspberry streak through them.*



*Topping off the bars is a quick job when you use both hands to crumble the dough.*

sugar. Cut the butter into 1-inch pieces and put it on top of the flour mixture. Add the almonds and pulse to blend until the butter pieces are the size of a pea. Press the mixture into the buttered pan. Bake for 25 min., until the edges are beginning to color.

**For the topping**—In an electric mixer, cream the butter and brown sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add the vanilla and then beat in the flour and salt, occasionally scraping down the sides of the bowl. Add the chopped chocolate and nuts and mix just to incorporate. Spread the topping over the crust and bake for another 30 min., until the top is golden brown. The bars should be firm to the touch.

## Poppy Seed Bars

If you love poppy seeds, this confection is for you.  
Yields about 48 bars.

### FOR THE FILLING:

*1½ cups poppy seeds  
2 oz. (½ cup) blanched, sliced, and toasted almonds  
1 Tbs. grated lemon zest  
1 cup sugar  
¾ tsp. ground nutmeg  
⅔ cup milk  
4 tsp. lemon juice  
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter*

### FOR THE BASE AND TOPPING:

*9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour  
3¾ oz. (1 cup) confectioners' sugar; more for dusting  
2 tsp. baking powder  
2 oz. (½ cup) blanched, sliced, and toasted almonds  
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter  
1 egg*

**For the filling**—Combine the poppy seeds, almonds, and lemon zest in a food processor and pulse until fine. Transfer the mixture to a saucepan and add the remaining ingredients. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the mixture boils and thickens to a syrup, about 10 min. Remove from the heat and let cool.

**For the base**—Heat the oven to 350°. Butter a 9x13-inch pan. Combine the flour, confectioners' sugar, baking powder, and almonds in a food processor. Pulse to blend. Cut the butter into 1-inch pieces and place it on top of the flour mixture. Pulse again until the butter pieces are the size of a pea. With the machine running, add the egg through the feed tube. Pulse until the dough forms a ball. If the blade lifts up, remove the dough and finish mixing by hand.

**To assemble**—Pat half the dough into the buttered pan, flouring your hands if the dough sticks to them. Pour the cooled filling over the base. Crumble the remaining dough over the filling to create a topping. Bake for 50 to 60 min., until the topping is browned. Cool the bars and, if you like, dust them with confectioners' sugar.

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Patricia Heyman is a pastry chef who teaches baking and pastry classes at Jefferson College in Louisville, Kentucky. When she's not teaching, she's often baking her "bite-and-a-half" desserts for a local caterer. ♦



**Moist filling; crisp topping.** These two dessert bars—poppy seed and raspberry—are impressive, but easy to make.

# Roasting Garlic Tames Its Fire



*Start with really fresh garlic. Cutting off the slender tops of the heads to expose the individual cloves will help them develop a rich, caramel color during roasting.*

Turn these pungent cloves into a mellow flavoring for spreads, sauces, and soups

BY SUSAN ASANOVIC

**G**arlic has built its reputation on its powerfully pungent flavor, so you may not know that it has a softer side. Roasting tames the sting while creating deep, mellow flavors. Garlic becomes sweeter and richer, and it loses the aggressive bite of raw or quickly cooked cloves.

Whole heads of roasted garlic make an outstanding appetizer: the soft cloves slip out of their skins, and the caramelized pulp can be spread on warm slices of bread. Roasted garlic is also great stirred into vinaigrettes, sauces, and soups, or blended with chopped herbs and butter. A spoonful of roasted garlic purée can make the difference between a good dish and a great dish.

## USE ONLY THE FRESHEST GARLIC

Perfectly fresh, rock-hard heads of garlic are essential. Soft, shriveled, or musty heads will taint your results.

A little olive oil is needed for roasting, and a good, fruity one that can stand up to garlic's assertiveness is the natural choice. The olive oil needn't be extra-virgin, but you should avoid oils that are labeled "light," as these are often light on flavor as well.

## FLOWERPOTS AND OTHER GARLIC ROASTERS

Terra-cotta garlic roasters are becoming a popular kitchen accessory, and they're a neat way to roast garlic. The porous, unglazed terra cotta is first

soaked in water so that, when heated, it adds a bit of steam to the roasting process. This helps seal in the garlic's natural moisture—keeping it soft and supple, but not soggy, as it roasts. This cookware may be cute, but it isn't required. I find these roasters a little difficult to manipulate in the oven, as they become very hot and have no handles. If you love the look and feel of a terra-cotta roaster, try a small terra-cotta flowerpot instead.

**Flowerpots.** A six-inch clay plant saucer with a high rim, covered by an inverted flowerpot, will hold four average heads of garlic. The clay should be unglazed and well washed. Before roasting, soak the pot and saucer for 15 minutes in clean, warm water.

**Ordinary roasting pans.** A small, heavy, oven-proof covered casserole or pot will also do the trick. Choose an earthenware, sandwiched-aluminum, or enameled-iron pan just large enough to accommodate the number of garlic heads you want to roast.

**Aluminum foil.** A double sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil, about 10 inches square for each head, is the most economical cookware for roasting garlic. This is also the winner for easy clean-up and handling, but the garlic doesn't brown quite as nicely.

## A MODERATE OVEN IS BEST, BUT THE ROASTING METHOD IS FLEXIBLE

Oven temperatures and timing are flexible, so garlic can be conveniently roasted along with other foods when the oven is on. I find, however, that roasting garlic too quickly gives it an acrid taste. The garlic's taste and texture is best with longer, gentler roasting.

Before roasting, cut off the top of each head—the end that comes to a closed point—so that each clove is exposed. Rub the garlic heads liberally with olive oil, sprinkle with salt, and roast in a 350°F oven for 45 minutes. Garlic can be roasted without oil, but the outside becomes brittle and the pulp is much less unctuous. If you use terra cotta, the method is a bit different: first soak the cover for 15 minutes in warm water; don't heat the oven ahead; and increase the roasting time by 10 to 15 minutes. Some cooks cover their garlic for three-quarters of the time and finish cooking it uncovered. This gives a softer, caramelized result, but you can roast garlic uncovered at low temperatures with excellent results and less fuss.

Constant, even heat makes your oven the easiest place to roast garlic with consistent results, but there are other ways to get beautifully browned bulbs.

**The grill.** Roasting garlic slowly over the dying embers of a grill will give your garlic terrific flavor, but it can be tricky. If the grill isn't covered or the heat isn't steady, you can wind up with a bulb that's half charred and half raw. But with a little practice, your garlic will come out smoky, soft, and utterly irresistible. Just oil the outside of the bulbs and set

them directly on the grill. Timing varies widely with grill heat and other variables, so watch the color of the garlic and give it an occasional squeeze to check for doneness.

**The microwave.** Yes, it's fast, clean, and easy, but as with microwaving meat, there are compromises. Microwaved garlic lacks the succulence produced by slow, dry heat, and as with meat, you don't get that "roasted" flavor, nor the attractive caramel color. Rather, it remains white and tastes similar to steamed garlic.

#### THE REWARDS OF ROASTING

When done, the cloves will be golden and the head will feel soft. To remove the purée, carefully separate the cloves and squeeze out the pulp. Or serve the whole head, and let each person coax the purée out as they spread it on crusty bread for an appetizer.

Each garlic head will yield about four tablespoons of purée. If you happen to have some roasted garlic left over, it won't be around for long: once you're used to having it on hand, you'll never understand how you lived without it. Squeeze out any unused cloves while the heads are still warm, pack them in a jar, seal, and refrigerate. It will keep this way for at least four days. Reheating whole heads doesn't work very well, as the garlic loses much of its flavor and can be difficult to separate from its papery husk.

Susan Asanovic is a registered dietitian and a licensed nutritionist who loves to cook. She lives in Wilton, Connecticut, where her refrigerator is seldom without a stash of roasted garlic purée. ♦



*Warm cloves of roasted garlic slip easily out of their skins. With only a little bit of coaxing, they can then be spread on slices of warm crusty bread and served as an appetizer.*



#### MORE USES FOR ROASTED GARLIC

The soft garlic paste that emerges after a slow, gentle roasting is certainly delicious, but this simple spread is just a starting point.

♦ **In soups.** Because the cloves are so soft, they melt magically into puréed soups with only a little bit of stirring.

♦ **In sauces.** Blend a tablespoon of roasted garlic with a tablespoon of cold butter and a bit of fresh rosemary and swirl it into the pan juices of any roast to create a heady, aromatic sauce.

♦ **With chicken.** Transform ordinary roasted chicken by rubbing a tablespoon of roasted garlic purée and some chopped fresh thyme under the breast skin before putting the bird in the oven.

♦ **In mayonnaise.** Whisk a few crushed roasted garlic cloves into plain mayonnaise for a Mediterranean-style aioli.

*Slow, gentle roasting yields the most succulent cloves. And once you're used to having a few tablespoons of roasted garlic in the refrigerator, you'll never understand how you lived without it.*

# Choosing a Beer to Complement Any Dish

From Pilsner to porter, beer's vast range of flavor makes it an easy match for food

BY MARTIN NACHEL

*Beer with dessert? It's not a mistake. A slice of rich chocolate cake tastes great with the full-bodied, malty flavors of a sweet stout.*



**B**eing a homebrewer and a certified beer judge has taught me a very important secret: beer has as many complex and varied flavors as wine. And when it comes to choosing what to drink with a fine meal, a bottle of beer can be just as enjoyable as any wine.

Recently, I've noticed the secret is out. The brewpub industry is booming, and many fine restaurants and bars are creating beer lists that rival those for their wines. Unfortunately, there's no popular wisdom on how to pair beer with food. Even novice wine drinkers have a simple "red-meat-gets-red-wine" rule to follow, but no guidelines are commonly known for beer drinkers. Still, I can explain why beer is as worthy a choice as wine for matching with meals. Once you know the basics, you can choose the right beer for the right food.

#### "WHITE" BEERS ARE LAGERS, "RED" BEERS ARE ALES

It helps to think of beer not as the contents of an aluminum can, but as any fermented beverage brewed with a cereal grain. This technical definition includes sake, which we don't commonly think of as a beer. Just as wines can be classified as "red" or "white," so can beer.

**Lagers.** The lager category is the white-wine equivalent. It's generally lighter in body and color, with a narrower flavor profile and a wider audience. Lager includes bock and Pilsner styles.

**Ales.** Darker, rounder, more robust and expressive, the ale category is the red-wine equivalent. It usually appeals to those with an experienced palate. Ale includes stouts and wheat beers.

#### DOZENS OF BEER STYLES FROM A FEW INGREDIENTS

Whether ale, lager, or sake, beer has four ingredients:

**Grain.** Beer is usually made from barley, but it can also be made from wheat or, in the case of sake, from rice. When the grain is soaked, fermented, and dried, it becomes a malt and is used in beer-

making. Dark malt is produced by high drying temperatures; crystal malt by roasting still-moist grains until caramelized; and pale malt by gentle roasting.

**Hops.** These are the flowers of a twining vine (*Humulus lupulus*), and they release a bitter oil when boiled. The longer the hops are in the brew, the more "hoppy" the beer becomes. Well-hopped beers have a distinctive herbal taste.

**Water.** The quality of the water has a great effect on the quality of the beer.

**Yeast.** Just as in breadmaking, there are many different varieties or strains of yeast, each with its own character. The type of yeast determines if the beer is considered an ale or lager.

These four ingredients add up to

dozens of beer styles. Each style has varying degrees of three characteristics: maltiness, body, and hoppiness.

**Maltiness** comes from the grain, which contains malt sugar that converts into alcohol during fermentation of the beer. Any sugar that doesn't make the conversion is left behind as a residual sweetness and becomes what's described as "maltiness." Some grains, however, are highly roasted or don't contain much sugar. In these beers, the maltiness doesn't express itself as sweetness but as the intense flavor of the grain itself. There are many more malty-sweet beers than ones that are malty-dry.

**Body.** How heavy or light the beer feels in the mouth is described as the

## It's hoppy and full-bodied. What is it?



Hop flower

Hoppy, malty, full-bodied... what does it all mean? To discover what these flavor qualities mean to your mouth, pop open a few beers in the name of scientific experimentation. Here's a list of the basic flavor elements, with a selection of readily available beers

that deliciously illustrate each one.

**Malty.** Imported German Oktoberfest beers and bocks are among the most widely available malty-sweet beers. There are relatively few malty-dry beers, but Guinness Stout would be a good example.

**Hoppy.** The Sierra Nevada and Pyramid ales have a strong "grassy" or herbal flavor from the hops. Both the herbal and bitter hop qualities can be found in Anchor's Liberty Ale and Samuel Adams Boston Lager.

**Light-bodied.** These thin beers pour very much like water. American light lagers

like Coors and "dry" beers such as Sapporo and Bud Dry are among the lightest-bodied beers in the world.

**Full-bodied.** When you pour these beers, you can see the heavy viscosity that translates to a creamy feeling in the mouth. Unfortunately, not many examples of these styles are widely distributed. Look for microbreweries that produce barley wine, Scotch ale, Russian imperial stout, doppelbock, and old ale beer styles. Imports include MacAndrew's Scotch Ale (Scotland) and Samuel Smith's Russian Imperial Stout (England).



Dark Malt



Crystal Malt



Pale Malt

# A guide to matching beer and food

Beer expresses its flavors with a large number of taste elements: malty-sweet, malty-dry, and hoppy, which can be bitter, herbal, or both. These flavors can be found in beer of light, medium, or full body. These variants are expressed in dozens of beer styles, each with its own unique characteristics.

The beer styles in the chart below are listed from sweetest to driest, with a description of body and suggested food pairings.

## HOW TO TRACK DOWN A GREAT BEER

If you know of a liquor store that takes pride in its wine selection, you'll probably find that it carries a wide variety of high-quality beers, too. But even a small-town package store can carry a surprisingly good selection that ranges from barley-wine ale to a honey-fermented porter. While some of these beers may be found near the aluminum 12-packs, fine beers are sometimes displayed unrefrigerated. Beers sold in oversized bottles may even be found next to the wine.

**BEER IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.** Most food-worthy beers are imported, but the microbrewery boom is a boon to the trailblazing beer enthusiast. Microbreweries are small, locally operated, and produce unique products, some of which are made in beer styles virtually unknown in America ten years ago. If there's a microbrewery in your area, that may be the best place for you to start your search for great beer.

**READ THE LABEL.** Most beer labels or cartons have all the information you need about the beer. Sometimes the key is in the product's name,

as when the brand contains words like "lager" or "stout." The label or carton's advertising copy is also helpful. Look for descriptive adjectives like "sweet," "fruity," or even "chocolate-roasted coffee finish."

**FRESH IS USUALLY BEST.** Good beer is not often a matter of vintage.

The first 90 days are the best of a beer's life, but most remain quite drinkable for a year. A few beers behave like wine and improve with age. These include Thomas Hardy's Ale, Traquair House Ale, Belgian Trappist triple ales, and Belgian fruit lambics.

Type of beer	Flavor	Body	Great partner
<b>ALES</b>			
Barley wine	very malty	full	fine chocolates
Scotch ale	very malty	full	glazed ham
Sweet stout	malty/mocha	full	chocolate, baked goods
Old ale	malty/hoppy	full	steak, organ meats
<i>Bière de garde</i>	malty	medium	herbed and spiced cheeses
Brown ale	caramelly sweet	medium	poultry, rich meats
Bitter	mildly sweet	light	poultry
Altbier	malty/hoppy	medium	aged cheeses
Wheat beer	tangy/mildly malty	light	delicate seafood
Cream ale	mildly sweet	light	vegetable dishes
Belgian witbier	fruity/spicy	light	fruits, light pastries
Pale ale	fruity/malty	medium	pork, lamb, assertive fish
Fruit lambic	fruity/acidic	light	desserts
India Pale Ale	toasty/malty/hoppy	medium	duck, rich meats
Porter	chocolatey/coffee	medium	oysters, cheese sauces
Dry stout	burnt malt/astringent	medium	oysters, rich chocolates
<b>LAGERS</b>			
Doppelbock	chocolatey/malty	full	weisswurst
Vienna	malty	full	spicy food, sausages
Oktoberfest	malty	medium	sausages, cured meats
Bock	malty	medium	wursts, spicy food
Munich lager	malty/hoppy	medium	pasta, lamb, pork
Rauchbier	smoky	medium	smoked ham, sausages
Steam beer	toasty malt/hoppy	medium	beef, mild cheeses
Black beer	lightly burnt malt	medium	sharp cheese, coarse bread
Pilsner	subtle malt/hoppy	light	fish, chicken
Light & dry beers	very mild malt	light	rice, sushi and sashimi

beer's body; it's the result of how much malt sugar converted into alcohol. Full-bodied beers have more residual sugar; lighter beers have less.

**Hoppiness** is the result of how long the hops were boiled in the brew. Hops give the beer a dimension of pleasant, gentle bitterness, as well as flavor and aromatics.

#### BEER, BEER EVERYWHERE—

#### WHICH ONE SHOULD I DRINK?

When it comes to choosing the best beer for a meal, I've devised a chart (shown at left) that describes beers by their styles and flavors and suggests potential dining partners. Once you understand the difference between, say, brown ale (sweet, malty, almost caramelly) and cream ale (very light in color and flavor), you can begin to understand the wisdom behind specific beer-food matchings.

**Any food that wine can match, beer can match as well or better.** With the enormous range of flavors that can be found in beer, it's easy to make a satisfying beer partner for almost any dish.

**Spicy food.** Serve a medium-bodied lager, such as a bock beer, a Märzenbier,



**Every beer has its glass.** Simple, straight-sided glasses are good for simple beers. Beers with more complex flavors, however, deserve tulip-shaped glasses, which help release the beer's aromas.



*A crisp wheat beer is ideal for fresh seafood.*

*When you squeeze a lemon wedge over the crab legs, save some juice for the beer: it accents wheat beer's refreshing flavor.*

or a Vienna-style beer. All are substantially malty and feel creamy. They're rather sweet and have good tongue-coating capabilities, which helps them to extinguish any culinary flames.

**Mediterranean.** Cuisine defined by olives and olive oil, garlic, herbs, citrus, and tangy cheeses needs the malty sweetness of a Munich lager. Pasta is easily paired with a well-balanced Munich pale lager. A slightly bitter, hoppy pale ale contrasts well with sweet, rich lamb. Crisp Pilsner beer is famous for pairing with fresh fish, and the intense, dry flavors of a porter stand up well to oysters, shellfish, and salt-cured fish.

**Indian.** While this cuisine is occasionally spicy, it should receive greater notice for its complex blends of herbs and spices. Indian curries demand light-

bodied premium lagers that won't overpower the food's finesse.

**Asian.** The Chinese and Japanese drink vast quantities of beer. For the Japanese, it's a welcome alternative to the potent *sake* that's regularly served at mealtime. Japan's principal beer style, lager, is very lightly hopped and closely resembles America's national brands. These beers are excellent for pairing with the delicate fresh (and often uncooked) seafood consumed throughout Japan.

The Chinese have also adopted a Western style of beer, the Pilsner, as their own. Tsingtao (pronounced JING-DOW) is one of the few brews from the People's Republic available in the United States. Tsingtao complements Chinese food, whether Cantonese, Sichuan, or Mandarin. Beers with mild hop bitterness and

some residual sweetness, like a Dortmunder Export, also pair nicely.

**French.** The home of *haute cuisine* is no place for timid beers. *Bière de garde*, a malty beer style the French invented, is a natural for the country's aged and herbed cheeses. Rich, earthy Belgian Trappist beers complement most red meats. For rich sauces, a mildly malty but sharply refreshing Saison is a perfect match.

**Continental cuisine.** In the "beer belt" of the north—Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic—the national cuisines were designed for beer. Strong, aged cheeses, pork, chicken, coarse breads, and the best of the wursts don't need any coaxing to find a liquid partner. Great pairings include the venerable Altbier with cheese, a malty-hoppy Maibock with barbecued white meats, Munich Dunkel (dark) with pumpernickel and rye, and a malty Oktoberfest or Märzenbier with most sausages. For a real treat, try a Bamberg Rauchbier (smoked beer) with smoked ham or smoked sausage.

**Dessert.** The idea of having beer with dessert may seem radical, but if you enjoy wine with dessert, the transition to beer should be easy. Rather than trying to match sweet with sweet, try contrasting tastes. A double chocolate cake would match a dry Irish-style stout or a robust porter. A Belgian witbier spiced any fruit-laced sweet. Strawberry shortcake pairs well with a pale bock, and a box of chocolates will disappear quickly with a bottle of framboise (raspberry lambic beer). Perhaps best of all, a pint of malty Scotch ale can be a dessert unto itself.

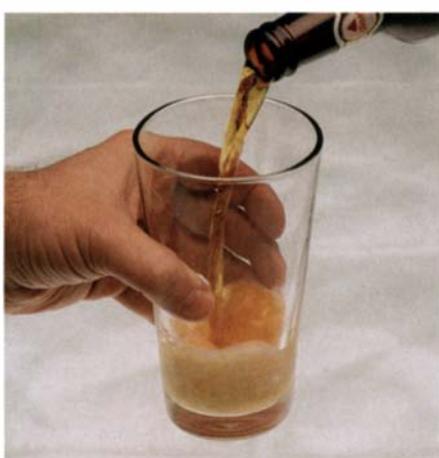
## The art of pouring beer

As an appreciative beer drinker, you'll want to pour beer properly in order to bring out its best characteristics. To do it well, you need to pour vigorously; this builds a desirable head of foam and releases the beer's carbon-dioxide gases, which lets the

beer's fragrance reach your nose. A proper head is about an inch, or "two fingers," in depth above the liquid.

The quality of the head tells you about the quality of the beer. If the bubbles are large, look "soapy," and dissipate quickly, it's an inferior

beer. Well-made beers have small, champagne-like bubbles and heads that can be described as dense, rocky, and tightly knit. The beer's proteins hold the head together and leave what's called "Belgian lace" on the sides of the glass.



Start pouring straight down the middle of the glass. Be sure to let the beer flow strongly.



Once the head begins forming, either slow the pour or tilt the glass slightly to slow the buildup.

Martin Nachel is an award-winning homebrewer and a freelance writer on beer and brewing topics. Co-founder of the Brewers of South Suburbia, he makes and drinks beer in Orland Park, Illinois. ♦

# Custom-Cutting Beef Tenderloin



For fresher, less expensive  
steaks and roasts,  
cut your own

BY MATTHEW LUST

If you consider meat-cutting the exclusive territory of professional butchers, you may be surprised to know that cutting your own custom steaks and roasts can be as easy as whisking up a vinaigrette. By cutting it yourself, you can be sure your meat is fresh, your steaks will be the right size and perfectly trimmed, and you'll save money—up to \$2.50 a pound. For summer entertaining, when the grill is the place to be, cutting your own beef makes a lot of sense.

As a professional meat cutter, I'll take you step by step through the process of cutting and trimming a beef tenderloin, using only a few basic tools. Whole tenderloins are usually available in plastic vacuum packs in the meat section of supermarkets, but if your store doesn't carry them, you can ask to have one ordered. You can make thin filet steaks for quick pan-frying, thicker steaks for grilling, and a luxurious tenderloin roast.

## YOUR TOOLS: TWO SHARP KNIVES

To make your work efficient, you'll need two high-quality knives (a butcher knife and a utility or boning knife; see sidebar on p. 60), a sharpening steel, a large cutting board, and an apron.

Be very careful whenever you use knives. They should be sharp, and the best way to use them safely is to let them do the work for you. Don't force the knife through the meat. The knife should glide through the meat using only minimal pressure.

## STORING YOUR STEAKS AND ROASTS

Any cut can be safely stored, tightly wrapped, in the refrigerator for up to three days. To freeze the meat, wrap pieces individually in waxed paper. Lay them flat on a baking sheet and freeze. When frozen, seal the packages in freezer bags. These can be stored for up to three months.

## TRIMMING A WHOLE TENDERLOIN

Begin by opening the plastic bag, draining off any excess liquid, and placing the tenderloin on the cutting board with the fat side facing up.



### KNIVES THAT MAKE THE CUT

I like to use knives that have a curved profile because they do some of the work for me. When I pull the knife, the curved blade forces its way deeper into the meat and makes a clean slice. Knives with a straight back also work, but they take a little more pressure on your part. Never use a serrated edge to cut meat: the meat will be sawed and shredded instead of sliced.

When you're working with any large piece of meat, you need a long carving knife to make the initial cuts. For trimming fat and other detail work where you don't need a lot of blade, an easy-to-handle small utility knife is best.



**1** Use a knife to cut tougher fat and sinew. The technique for removing fat is a matter of pulling and cutting. Start at the thinner end of the tenderloin. Hold the layer of fat and silver membrane taut, and slice it off with a boning knife.



**2** Use your fingers to pull off the soft fat. Peel and pull the soft and crumbly fat until most of it is removed.

The tenderloin doesn't need to be fat-free when you start cutting steaks, but remove enough so that you have a clear view of the meat and of the place where you want to make your first cut.

## CUTTING A WHOLE TENDERLOIN

The tenderloin can be cut into steaks (filet steaks and smaller filet mignons) and also into roasts, such as the classic Châteaubriand (a 5-inch roast cut from the center of the tenderloin) or a larger roast that needs trussing. Tenderloin is also excellent when cut into thin strips for stir-fries.



**1** Measure and then cut a steak. Before cutting anything, use a ruler to measure your thumb from the tip of the nail down. Note where the  $\frac{1}{2}$ -,  $\frac{3}{4}$ -, and 1-inch marks are so you can use your thumb as a guide to cut your steaks consistently. For a filet steak, start at the tenderloin's thick end, measure off about an inch and slice through the meat, using a few clean strokes. Do not saw back and forth. Cut smaller filet mignons from the thin end of the tenderloin.



**2** Use your fingers for the final trim. Tenderloin steaks should have little fat on them. After cutting, just pull away any remaining fat.

## TURNING A TENDERLOIN INTO A ROAST

The tenderloin can also provide a beautiful roast. And since you cut it yourself, its size is up to you.



**1** To make a large filet roast, cut off about six steaks from the thick end of the tenderloin. Trim any excess fat from the tenderloin and tuck the small end under to make an even roast.



**2** To truss the roast, tie several lengths of kitchen twine securely around the meat, spacing them about 1½ inches apart. Roast at 450° until the internal temperature is about 135° for medium rare.

Matthew Lust has all of his fingers and is a journeyman meat cutter at the IGA in Lagrange, Ohio.

# How to cook a steak

BY RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN

When you've custom-cut your own steak, you want to cook it perfectly. I prepare 200 pounds of beef every day at my restaurant, and I know how to give good beef the treatment it deserves.

### CHOOSE YOUR METHOD TO SUIT THE SIZE OF THE STEAK

Steaks from prime- or choice-grade meat are tender. To retain moisture and flavor, tender meat needs the dry, intense heat of grilling, broiling, searing, or roasting.

The steak's thickness determines how close the meat needs to be to the heat. You want to coordinate a nicely seared surface with the right degree of doneness inside. Cook thin steaks very close to the heat; thick steaks, farther away. For example, you wouldn't broil a 6-ounce filet: by the time the surface was seared, the inside would be overcooked. Pan-searing or roasting in a heavy skillet would be a better choice; these give the meat more contact with hot metal. Some cuts get the best results from a combination of cooking methods.

Here are some sample cooking techniques and times; all produce a rare to medium-rare steak.

#### ◆ 12-OUNCE FILET STEAK:

Season the entire filet with salt and freshly ground pepper. Broil or grill it 4 inches from the flame. Cook each side for 3 minutes, and then turn again and cook each side for 2 minutes, for a total of 10 minutes. Let it rest for 3 to 5 minutes before serving to allow the juices to redistribute.

#### ◆ 10-OUNCE NEW YORK

**STRIP OR RIB-EYE:** Heat a cast-iron skillet until it's smoking hot. Season the steak on both sides with salt and freshly

ground pepper. Sear the steak in the skillet for 1½ minutes on each side. Don't use oil; the steak's fat will provide enough. Remove it from the pan and let it rest for 3 to 5 minutes before serving.

#### ◆ 16-OUNCE NEW YORK

**STRIP OR RIB-EYE:** Heat a grill until very hot and heat the oven to 400°F. Season both sides of the steak heavily with salt and freshly ground pepper. Put the steak on the grill and cook it for four minutes on each side, turning once. Remove it, allow to rest for 10 minutes, and then put it in the hot oven for 4 minutes. Remove it, let it rest for 3 to 5 minutes, slice, and serve.

### Chamberlain's Homemade Steak Sauce

A good steak deserves a great sauce. I'd like to think this is one of them. Yields 1½ cups.

1 Tbs. olive oil  
¼ cup chopped onion  
2 Tbs. honey  
¼ cup apple-cider vinegar  
¼ cup balsamic vinegar  
¼ cup soy sauce  
¼ cup Ruby Red grapefruit juice  
¼ cup beef broth  
¼ cup Worcestershire sauce  
3 Tbs. tomato paste  
2 tsp. powdered garlic  
2 Tbs. raisins  
1½ tsp. black peppercorns  
¾ tsp. dried thyme  
½ tsp. salt

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan. Sauté the onions over medium heat until soft. Add the honey and continue cooking for 2 min. Add the remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to medium low. Simmer for 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Remove and cool. Purée in blender until smooth. Refrigerated, the sauce will keep indefinitely.

Richard Chamberlain is the chef/owner of Chamberlain's Prime Chop House in Dallas, Texas. ◆

# A Mediterranean Feast of Many Dishes, Many Flavors

The traditional *mezze* means “welcome” to a sumptuous meal of fresh tastes and textures

BY LISSA DOUMANI

A whiff of extra-virgin olive oil, the irresistible scent of onion and garlic, the fresh citrus allure of lemon juice. These are the fragrances that whet my appetite when I approach a *mezze* table—that spread of many savory dishes served in Lebanon, Greece, and other eastern Mediterranean countries. Smoky eggplant *baba ghanouj*, creamy *hummus*, and fresh herbal *tabbouleh* are a few *mezze* dishes you may know already.

The *mezze* brings people together: it's served family-style, with many dishes spread across the table. *Mezzes* are perfect for parties or buffets.

## MENU

*Tabbouleh*  
(Parsley & cracked-wheat salad)

◆  
*Hummus*  
(Chickpea & tahini purée)

◆  
*Baba Ghanouj*  
(Eggplant & tahini purée)

◆  
*Foul Imdamis*  
(Lebanese fava beans)

◆  
*Loubieh Bziet*  
(Green beans with onions)

◆  
*Kibbeh*  
(Minced lamb with cracked wheat)

◆  
*Labne*  
(Drained yogurt with mint)

Photos except where noted: Alan Richardson



*A mezze is a great way to entertain. Here, seven “do-ahead” dishes offer lots of fresh vegetables and fragrant herbs, earthy grains and beans, and just a touch of rich yogurt and lamb.*



*Tabbouleh*  
is a parsley  
salad with  
a little  
cracked  
wheat, not  
a cracked-  
wheat  
salad with  
a little  
parsley.

Parsley, mint, tomato,  
and scallion make  
*tabbouleh* a bright  
contrast to earthier  
mezze dishes, such  
as smoky eggplant  
*baba ghanouj*.



#### MEZZES, LARGE OR SMALL, WORK WELL AT HOME

When feasting on *mezze* in Lebanon, you can always tell how many courses are to come by counting the number of plates stacked in front of you. At home, just choose the dishes that suit your time and the number of diners. You don't need to go to extremes to enjoy a *mezze*. Some of the recipes are time-consuming to prepare, but many of them can be made the day before. Whether you serve one or two of these recipes as appetizers, or bring out all of them for a fuller *mezze* experience, you'll find that the delight of Lebanese cuisine translates easily into your own cooking style.

**Flavors of the mezze.** While a *mezze* can be endless in variation, many of the dishes have common flavorings. Olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, allspice, and cinnamon are constants, as are fresh vegetables for scooping and dipping. A typical arrangement is a whole head of romaine lettuce, standing upright with the leaves' tops cut off, surrounded by cucumbers, tomatoes, scallions, radishes, and carrots. Pita bread (another edible utensil) is always present, as is *labne*, which looks like cream cheese but is made from drained yogurt that's been lightly salted and flecked with fresh mint. *Labne* is

delicious and seems to improve the flavor of anything it accompanies.

#### THE RIGHT WAY TO MAKE TABBOULEH

A good *tabbouleh* is a parsley salad with a little cracked wheat, not a cracked-wheat salad with a little parsley. I don't know when Americans reversed these proportions, but I feel it's my duty to set the record straight. *Tabbouleh* should also have an amount of mint, scallion, and tomato equal to that of the parsley. Lightly dressed with good olive oil and lots of fresh lemon juice, this is a very green and refreshing salad.

#### THE PLEASURE OF DIPPING IN

One of the joys of eating at a *mezze* table is the tactile fun of plunging pita bread and vegetable slices into smooth, savory pastes. That's why *hummus* and *baba ghanouj* are two of the most frequently served dishes.

**Hummus couldn't be much easier to make.** It's a purée of cooked chickpeas, tahini (sesame-seed paste; its consistency is similar to that of peanut butter), lemon juice, and garlic. Whir it all in a food processor until very smooth, and you've got great *hummus*.

The ingredients for *baba ghanouj* are almost identical to *hummus*—chickpeas are switched for

eggplant—but the eggplant takes a bit more preparation than the chickpeas.

**Baba ghanouj** is guaranteed to make a mess of your kitchen, but it's worth every spot. The eggplant is roasted or grilled whole, and the flesh is scooped out and mixed by hand with the other ingredients. Some recipes suggest roasting the eggplant in your oven, but this doesn't impart the best flavor. You need an open fire, which can come from the gas flame on a stove or from your backyard barbecue. In either case, the technique is the same. Lay the eggplant on the open flame, rotating it occasionally. As the outside burns, the flesh becomes mushy. Carefully scrape away the skin from the pulp, removing all charred bits.

#### SIMPLE BEANS BECOME EXOTIC DISHES

One popular *mezze* dish has an unfortunate name—*foul*. (*Foul* is pronounced FOOL; the word means “beans” in Lebanese.) The taste of *foul imdamis*, however, is nothing but delicious. It’s very simple to make: sauté onions and garlic in olive oil, simmer with beans, tomatoes, and spices, and finish with a generous drizzle of lemon juice and olive oil.

The only tricky part of the recipe is finding the beans. They’re often labeled as fava beans, but they aren’t the fava beans commonly found in grocery stores. The beans you want are round, reddish brown, and little smaller than chickpeas. They’re sold in Middle eastern groceries in cans labeled *foul mudammas*.

The dish the Lebanese call *loubieh bziet* (LOO-bee-ah be-ZET) means “green beans with onions,” but that doesn’t effectively convey how wonderful this dish is. The onions are sliced thin and cooked very slowly until they become browned and sweet. Green beans are added, the pot covered, and the whole thing cooked for 30 to 40 minutes. The result is a dish of meltingly soft beans and onions. Served hot, warm, or cold, and scooped with pita or your fingers, the combination is irresistible. Okra or greens can be substituted for the beans, and sometimes tomatoes are added as well.

#### KIBBEH, RAW OR COOKED—IT'S YOUR CHOICE

My favorite *mezze* dish may be *kibbeh*. *Kibbeh* is minced lamb mixed with cracked wheat, and it’s eaten both raw and cooked. I prefer *kibbeh nayye* (pronounced KIB-eh NAH-yee), the equivalent of steak tartare.

The process of making *kibbeh* is similar to that of making meatloaf. Essentially, you mix ground meat with seasonings. But since *kibbeh* is eaten raw, special care must be taken. You’ll need two pounds of boneless leg of lamb. Ask your butcher to completely trim every bit of fat, tendon, and sinew from the meat. If your butcher can’t oblige, you’ll have to go through the process at home. The success of this

# In Lebanon, *mezze* is a tradition of hospitality

My family gave me an early introduction to the Middle East’s *mezze* tradition, but it wasn’t until I visited Lebanon last year that I experienced a full-fledged *mezze* firsthand. While I had eaten many of these dishes when I was growing up, it wasn’t the same as being presented with thirty dishes at one table—with a main course to follow!

Eating and sharing of food with guests and strangers is an honored ritual in the Middle East. While the enormous quantities of a *mezze* may seem daunting, it is offered in the spirit of hospitality. Uninvited guests are common party fixtures, and the sheer volume of food saves hosts a lot of guesswork.



*Don't serve these green beans al dente. A good loubieh bziet depends on long cooking. The slowly sautéed onions and gently simmered green beans need a long time on the stove for the flavors to meld.*

dish is absolutely dependent on using perfectly lean, trimmed, fresh lamb.

The meat must be ground fine, and either a food processor or a mixer with a meat grinder attachment will work well. If you use a meat grinder, put the meat through twice. If you use a food processor, chill the blade first and chop only small amounts at a time. Too much meat at once will make the machine work harder, which will warm up the lamb. It may become a purée instead of a fine grind.

To assemble the *kibbeh*, add the cracked wheat, grated onion, and spices to the meat and mix with your hands. It’s important to keep your hands cool as you mix the meat, so set a bowl of ice water at your side and dip in your hands occasionally.

If you’re not up to trying raw lamb, shape the *kibbeh* mixture into small patties and sauté them slowly in clarified butter or olive oil. These are delicious stuffed in pita and served with *labne*.

# How to serve many dishes at once

The *mezze* is custom-made for party-giving. Here's a countdown to help you prepare a *mezze* in advance.

It's nice to take care of things ahead of time, but remember that the *mezze* is an inherently casual way of eating. Nothing is meant to be served piping hot, and the best temperature for most dishes is lukewarm. Nor are quantities meant to be a sure thing in Middle Eastern cooking. The yields for these recipes are much like the Lebanese attitudes toward hospitality—they will expand to fit.

*It isn't a meatloaf, it's kibbeh. This mixture of lamb and cracked wheat, lightly seasoned with cinnamon and allspice, can be served raw as shown, or shaped into small patties, fried, and stuffed into pita bread.*



## 2 DAYS AHEAD

- ◆ soak the chickpeas (if using dried)
- ◆ make the *hummus*
- ◆ order the lamb

## 1 DAY AHEAD

- ◆ make the *labne*
- ◆ make the *loubieh bziet*
- ◆ make the *foul imdamis*
- ◆ pick up the lamb; give it a very thorough trim

## THE DAY OF THE MEZZE

- ◆ make the *baba ghanouj*
- ◆ make the *tabbouleh*
- ◆ make the *kibbeh*

## 1 TO 2 HOURS BEFORE SERVING

- ◆ bring the *hummus*, *foul imdamis*, and *loubieh bziet* to room temperature
- ◆ cook the *kibbeh* (if not eating raw)
- ◆ wash and trim the vegetables for dipping

## Tabbouleh

(Parsley & cracked-wheat salad)

It's important to chop the ingredients by hand; the food processor tends to make mush. Make sure the parsley is washed and dried well. If you're making this ahead of time, don't add the lemon juice until just before serving. Serves six to eight as part of a mezze.

*1/3 cup fine-grind cracked wheat  
1 bunch (about 6) scallions, chopped fine  
3 cups finely chopped parsley leaves (flat-leaf preferred)  
2/3 cup finely chopped fresh mint  
4 medium tomatoes, cored, seeded, and diced  
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste*

Soak the cracked wheat in warm water for about 30 min. Squeeze out the water and put the cracked wheat in a large bowl.

Toss the scallions, parsley, and mint with the cracked wheat. Add the tomatoes, drizzle in the olive oil, and toss again. Add the lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Toss again and taste for seasoning.

## Hummus

(Chickpea & tahini purée)

This makes a wonderful dip for vegetables. Make sure the chickpeas are very tender. If the *hummus* is too thick, thin it with water. Serves six to eight as part of a mezze.

*One 19-oz. can chickpeas, or 1 cup dried chickpeas that have been soaked and cooked until very tender  
1/2 cup tahini (sesame-seed paste)  
1 clove garlic  
1/3 cup fresh lemon juice  
Salt to taste  
Olive oil  
Cayenne*

If using canned chickpeas, drain them, reserving the liquid, and rinse them. If using dried, cooked chickpeas, drain them and reserve 1/2 cup of the cooking liquid.

Purée all the ingredients in a food processor until very smooth, adding the reserved liquid as needed. You should have a medium-thick paste. Season with salt. Transfer the *hummus* to a shallow bowl, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with cayenne. Serve with pita or raw vegetables.

## Baba Ghanouj

(Eggplant & tahini purée)

The most important part of this dish is roasting the eggplant. I do this on my gas stove, and it makes a mess, but the flavor can't be beat. Other options are on a grill, under a broiler, or in a hot oven. The oven is least preferable because it can't give the eggplant the desired slightly charred flavor. Serves six to eight as part of a mezze.

*3 lb. eggplant  
1 tsp. minced garlic  
1/2 cup tahini (sesame-seed paste)  
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice  
1 tsp. salt*

To roast the eggplant, set each eggplant directly on the flame, grill, or grate. (If you're using the oven, set a tray on the rack under the eggplant to catch any drips.) The

eggplant will start to crack and give off juices; it should become an ashy gray-black. Turn it as it cooks, but be careful—as it softens under heat, it becomes difficult to move without splitting. When the eggplant is charred gray and very tender, transfer it to a plate to cool.

Slice off the top of the cooled eggplant, and then cut it in half lengthwise. Use a spoon to carefully remove all the pulp, but avoid any bits of blackened skin. With a fork, stir the eggplant to break up large pieces and add the rest of the ingredients. Taste as you mix and adjust seasonings. Turn the *baba ghanouj* into a bowl and chill before serving.

## Foul Imdamis

(Lebanese fava beans)

Despite the recipe's name, these fava beans are nothing like the ones used in Western cooking. This addictive dish uses beans called *foul mudammas*, which are available in cans at Lebanese groceries. If you can't find them, chickpeas are the best substitute. *Serves six to eight as part of a mezze.*

**1/3 cup olive oil**  
**4 medium onions, chopped**  
**2 cloves garlic, minced**  
**4 medium tomatoes, chopped**  
**Two 20-oz. cans foul mudammas, drained**  
**1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon**  
**1/4 tsp. ground cumin**  
**1/4 tsp. ground ginger**  
**1/4 tsp. cayenne**  
**1/4 tsp. ground cardamom**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**1/4 cup fresh lemon juice**

Heat a medium frying pan over medium heat until hot. Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the olive oil to the pan, wait about 30 seconds, and then add the onions. Sauté until the onions are translucent, about 5 min. Add the garlic and tomatoes and cook for 5 min. over medium heat. Add the beans and spices; cook for 15 min. over low heat, stirring occasionally. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Just before serving, stir in the lemon juice. Drizzle the remaining olive oil over the beans and serve with pita.

## Loubieh Bziet

(Green beans with onions)

This recipe also works well with okra, spinach, escarole, and chard. Tomatoes, fresh or canned, may also be added to the green beans. *Serves six to eight as part of a mezze.*

**1/4 cup olive oil**  
**4 large onions, cut in half and sliced  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. thick**  
**2 lb. green beans, ends trimmed**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

In a large frying pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the onions. Sauté for a few minutes, until the onions turn translucent. Reduce the heat to low and cook the onions for 20 to 25 min., stirring occasionally. The onions should turn a rich caramel color.

Rinse the beans in a colander; you want just a small amount of water to cling to them. Add the beans to the onions, stir, and cover the pan. Keep the heat low and cook for about 45 min., stirring occasionally. These beans are not served *al dente*; they should dull in color and become limp. Season with salt and pepper and serve hot or at room temperature.



A quick whirl in the food processor gives you creamy, nutty hummus. Chickpeas, tahini (sesame paste), lemon, and garlic blend to make a nutritious dip for raw vegetables or pita bread.



Photo: Dana Harris



For *baba ghanouj*, char the eggplant right on the burner.

The skin will become an ashy gray-black (above). The process is messy, but the smoky-sweet flavor and creamy texture of the finished dip (above left) make it worth the trouble. Use an outdoor grill or your broiler if you don't have a gas stove.

## Kibbeh

(Minced lamb with cracked wheat)

I love raw *kibbeh*, but the cooked version is also excellent. I've included instructions for both. *Serves six to eight as part of a mezze.*

**2 lb. boneless leg of lamb, every trace of fat, tendon, and sinew removed**  
**3/4 cup fine-grind cracked wheat, soaked in warm water for 30 min.**  
**1/2 cup finely grated onion**  
**1 Tbs. ground cinnamon**  
**1 tsp. ground allspice**  
**1 1/2 tsp. salt**  
**1 tsp. cayenne**

(Recipe list continues)

*Awkward name, delicious dish.* Foul imdamis is a wonderful mix of Lebanese fava beans, onions, garlic, and spices. The right beans are small, round, brownish fava beans that are available in cans labeled foul mudammas in most Middle Eastern grocery stores.

### SPECIAL TOUCHES THAT MAKE THE MEZZE

If you'd like to turn a mezze into a full-fledged party menu, there are a few accessories that will ensure you serve an unforgettable meal.

◆ Start with *arak*, a strong, anise-flavored liqueur.

Serve it on the rocks, and watch your guests' reactions as the clear liquid turns milky white when it hits the ice. A good nonalcoholic option is a spritzer made from pomegranate syrup mixed with club soda.

◆ For dessert, try serving *baklava* from a local Middle Eastern bakery with some fresh fruit. *Flan* and simple nut-studded butter cookies are also popular desserts in Lebanon.



#### FOR GARNISH:

1 small red onion, cut into wedges  
Extra-virgin olive oil

Cut the perfectly lean lamb meat into 2-inch cubes. Put the cubes in a bowl, cover with plastic, and refrigerate for about 30 min.

Drain the wheat, squeeze out as much water as possible, and set aside.

To grind the meat, use a meat grinder with a fine die or a food processor. If you use a grinder, put the meat through the die twice. If you use a food processor, chill the blade and chop only small amounts at a time. Be careful not to overwork the lamb or you'll make a purée.

Fill a bowl with ice water and dip in your hands occasionally to keep them cool as you mix the ingredients. Add the wheat, the grated onion, and all the spices to the ground meat. Mix as if preparing a meatloaf. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Smooth the *kibbeh* into a large ball, dipping your hands in the cold water as you work. Slide the *kibbeh* onto a plate and make a small well in the center of the meat. Cover with plastic and chill for at least 30 min.

To serve, arrange sections of red onion, flower-petal fashion, around the *kibbeh*. Fill the well with olive oil and serve with pita.

**For cooked *kibbeh***—After you make the meat mixture, shape it into 2½-inch patties that are the same thickness

throughout. Over medium heat, slowly sauté the *kibbeh* patties in clarified butter or olive oil. When cooked through, serve them as appetizers or stuffed in pita for sandwiches. *Labne* is an excellent accompaniment.

#### Labne

(Drained yogurt with mint)

The yogurt takes all day to drain, but it's hands-off cooking—you don't even have to watch over it. Yields 1½ cups.

1 qt. plain yogurt, made without gelatin or thickeners  
1 tsp. salt  
¼ cup finely chopped fresh mint

Mix the yogurt and salt together. Line a colander with a double thickness of cheesecloth and set it over a bowl. Pour the yogurt into the cheesecloth, cover the colander tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate the colander and bowl for at least 8 hours. The longer the yogurt drains, the thicker the *labne* will be.

Remove the *labne* from the cheesecloth, turn it into a bowl, and return it to the refrigerator. Just before serving, stir in the mint. Serve in a shallow bowl with pita as an appetizer, or as part of a full mezze.

Lissa Doumani owns Terra, a restaurant in St. Helena, California, with her husband, Hiro Sone. ♦

# The Key to Smooth, Rich, Homemade Ice Cream

An ice-cream pro shares his recipes and a secret ingredient—skim milk powder

BY ANDREW HINGSTON

**S**uper-rich, I'd-kill-for-another-spoonful ice cream usually comes in pint cartons, but it's also available in your home ice-cream maker. You may never have found it there, however, because most recipes don't include an ingredient that's guaranteed to make the difference between good and great ice cream. I made this discovery as a student at Penn State's Ice Cream School (the one that gave Ben & Jerry their start), and I'll show you how to make ice cream that's extraordinary every time.

## MAKING GREAT ICE CREAM IS A SCIENCE

People are passionate about ice cream, but the main ingredients that make it are pretty mundane: butterfat (from cream), sugar, and water. These basic elements form an emulsion—a mixture in which particles of fat are dispersed in liquid. This ice-cream base is frozen while air is whipped into it during churning.

**Lots of cream, however, doesn't necessarily mean great ice cream.** While ice cream that's creamy and smooth should contain 14% to 20% butterfat, too much butterfat will make it stiff and greasy.

You also need to use ingredients that will stabilize the emulsion, keeping the fat well distributed for the creamiest confection. Egg yolks are the classic

*For deeply flavored caramel ice cream, add caramel sauce to the ice cream as it freezes.*



# Inspirations for flavoring ice cream

*Great ice creams need a practical formula, but flavor is an area where fantasies can take flight. Below is a list of flavors to get you started.*

Fresh Fruit	Dried Fruit	Candies & Confections	Nuts	Spirits
Bananas	Apricots	Chocolate chunks	Almonds	Amaretto
Blueberries	Blueberries	Heath bars	Brazil nuts	Armagnac
Cherries	Cherries	Peppermints	Cashews	Cointreau
Mangoes	Cranberries	Brownies	Hazelnuts	<i>Crème de cassis</i>
Oranges	Dates	Caramel sauce	Pecans	<i>Crème de menthe</i>
Peaches	Peaches	Fudge sauce	Walnuts	Frangelico
Raspberries	Prunes			Kahlua or Tia Maria
Strawberries	Raisins			Rum or whiskey

ingredient for this. Eggs' protein helps hold the emulsion of fat and water together, and while egg yolks have a high fat content, that type of fat adds a pleasant richness and doesn't add to the butterfat. But egg yolks alone aren't enough of a stabilizing influence.

## WHY SKIM MILK POWDER IS IN THE BEST ICE CREAMS

Skim milk powder is the key to the quality of all-natural ice creams. Together with egg yolks, skim milk powder helps create ice cream that's smooth, dense, and rich.

The protein in skim milk powder helps stabilize the emulsion without adding fat. It does this by absorbing most of the extra water in the ice-cream mixture. Too little water gives ice cream a peculiarly sandy feel on the tongue, but too much unabsorbed water results in iciness. Instead of turning icy after two or three days in the freezer, ice cream that's made with skim milk powder should last a few weeks.

Cocoa also absorbs excess water without adding fat; this is one of the reasons it's used instead of chocolate in many "chocolate" ice creams. Chocolate contains a lot of cocoa butter, a fat that quickly hardens when chilled, which can create an ice cream that's difficult to scoop. But chocolate provides flavor that cocoa alone can't match. One solution is to use a small amount of the most intense chocolate you can

find, such as Callebaut or Valrhôna. Since imported chocolate can cost \$20 a pound, I sometimes use unsweetened baker's chocolate and increase the sugar in the recipe.

## YOU HAVE TO COOK ICE CREAM BEFORE YOU CAN FREEZE IT

The first step toward a great ice cream is to combine sugar, milk, cream, skim milk powder, and egg yolks and then cook the mixture to make a custard. Use a stainless-steel bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water so you can keep the heat low and constant.

There are two measures of the custard's readiness: temperature and time. The custard should thicken noticeably as it cooks, though it should be very smooth. (Lumps would mean that it has gotten too hot and curdled.) Even more important, you should keep the custard between 165° and 180°F for at least 10 to 15 minutes. Maintaining this temperature range is vital. Anything under 165° is too low to be effective, and even one degree above 180° can mean curdling.

After cooking, cool the custard immediately in an ice bath until it reaches 65°. Not only does this heating and cooling procedure improve the ice cream's texture, it also comes as close as possible in a home environment to pasteurizing your mixture. Since egg yolks can contain salmonella bacteria, you should never skip these steps.

When the custard has cooled, add any flavorings that contain alcohol, such as vanilla extract or a liqueur. This ensures that the alcohol won't evaporate in the custard's heat, leaving a little spirited kick. Refrigerate the mixture for at least four hours, preferably overnight, in a tightly covered plastic or stainless-steel container. This storage time improves the ice cream's texture and flavor, but make sure the custard isn't near any aromatic foods in your refrigerator. The custard can quickly pick up the flavors of garlic, onions, and spices. After the base has been refrigerated overnight, you should churn and freeze it that day.



**A thermometer shouldn't be optional equipment.** Be certain that the custard has reached 165°F, not only to help ensure the recipe's success, but also to protect against salmonella contamination from the egg yolks.

*In this delicious ice cream, three powders make the difference: cocoa, espresso, and skim milk. The first two powders provide flavor, while the skim milk powder gives the ice cream its silky texture.*

Photo: Mary Ellen Bartley



### CHURN IT BY HAND OR BY MOTOR

The world's best ice cream can be made in any kind of ice-cream maker. I currently use a Krups model, but since all models work pretty much the same way, I think the only real mistake you can make is choosing one that costs too much.

Before you pour the custard into the ice-cream maker, be sure the machine is large enough to contain your batch; ice cream swells as it freezes. (My recipes are designed for a 1½-quart maker.) Freshly made ice cream will be soft. Once it has been churned, scoop it into a resealable plastic or stainless-steel container to harden in the freezer for a few hours.

Keep ice cream as cold as possible. If you've ever opened a container of ice cream and found that it had become mysteriously gooey, your freezer was probably responsible. Frost-free freezers repeatedly warm and cool by a few degrees, which encourages the ice cream's water and fat molecules to separate and clump

with their own kind. That's why you shouldn't refreeze ice cream after it has been brought up to serving temperature. The best solution is to eat homemade ice cream as soon as you can—but I don't think that will be a problem.

### Orange Ice Cream with Dried Cherries & Toasted Pecans

*Yields 1½ quarts.*

**2 medium navel oranges**  
**2 cups heavy cream**  
**1 cup skim milk**  
**½ cup sugar**  
**½ cup light brown sugar, packed**  
**Large pinch salt**  
**¼ cup skim milk powder**  
**5 large or 4 extra-large egg yolks**  
**½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise**  
**½ tsp. natural vanilla extract**  
**½ cup dried cherries**  
**¼ cup orange juice**  
**2½ Tbs. Cointreau or other orange liqueur**  
**¾ cup large pecan pieces**

**Peel the oranges.** Use a vegetable peeler to pare off the peel in thick, smooth strips. Turn the peel over so the white pith faces you. Scrape away the pith with the peeler or the edge of a sharp knife. Set the zest aside.

**Make the ice-cream base.** Fill a medium saucepan half-way with water and set it over medium heat. Combine the cream, milk, sugars, salt, skim milk powder, egg yolks, vanilla bean, and orange zest in a medium stainless-steel bowl and whisk to mix completely.

Put the bowl on the saucepan and cook the mixture, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon or spatula, until it reaches between 165° and 180°F. Test the temperature with a candy thermometer. Keep the temperature in that range for at least 10 to 15 min., still stirring. The mixture will thicken.

**Cool the ice-cream base.** At the end of the cooking period, put the bowl in an ice bath to cool. Add the vanilla extract. Stir frequently, replenishing the ice as necessary, until the mixture cools to 65° (about 15 min.). Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight.

**Plump the cherries and toast the pecans.** Meanwhile, soak the dried cherries in the orange juice and Cointreau for a few hours until plump.

Toast the pecans on a baking sheet in a 350° oven for about 10 min., shaking the sheet occasionally to prevent burning. The nuts are ready when they color

*For a full-flavored mixture, infuse and then strain. The author simmers orange zest in the custard to release its fragrance and flavor. After the mixture chills, he strains out the zest and freezes the ice cream.*



slightly and become fragrant. Allow them to cool to room temperature.

**Freeze the ice cream.** When you're ready to freeze the ice cream, pour the mixture through a sieve to remove the orange zest and vanilla bean. Add half the marinated cherries and any excess liquid from the cherries.

Begin freezing according to your ice-cream maker's directions. After 8 to 10 min., the ice cream should be semisolid—about the stiffness of cake batter. At this point, add the remaining cherries and the toasted pecans. Continue freezing until the ice cream holds stiff

peaks. Transfer the ice cream to a resealable plastic or stainless-steel container and freeze overnight until firm.

### Caramel Ice Cream with Toasted Almonds

*Yields 1 generous quart.*

**2 cups heavy cream**  
**1 cup skim milk**  
**½ cup light brown sugar, packed**  
**Large pinch salt**  
**¼ cup skim milk powder**  
**5 large or 4 extra-large egg yolks**  
**½ cup caramel sauce (see recipe at right)**  
**½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise**  
**1½ tsp. natural vanilla extract**  
**½ cup whole blanched almonds**

**Make the ice-cream base.** Fill a medium saucepan half-way with water and set it over medium heat. Combine the cream, milk, brown sugar, salt, skim milk powder, and egg yolks in a stainless-steel bowl. Whisk to mix completely.

Put the bowl on the saucepan and cook the mixture, stirring constantly, until the base reaches between 165° and 180°F. Test the temperature with a candy thermometer. Keep the temperature in that range for 5 min. Add the caramel sauce and the split vanilla bean. Continue maintaining the temperature, stirring frequently, for another 5 to 10 min. The mixture will thicken.

**Cool the ice-cream base.** At the end of the cooking period, put the bowl in an ice bath to cool. Add the vanilla extract. Stir frequently, replenishing the ice as necessary, until the mixture cools to 65° (about 15 min.). Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight.

**Toast the almonds.** Toast the almonds on a baking sheet in a 350° oven for about 10 min., shaking the sheet occasionally to prevent burning. The nuts are ready when they color slightly and become fragrant. Chop the almonds coarse and set aside.

**Freeze the ice cream.** Remove the vanilla bean from the base. Freeze the base following your ice-cream maker's directions. After 8 to 10 min., the ice cream should be semisolid—about the stiffness of cake batter. At this point, add the almonds. Continue freezing until the ice cream holds stiff peaks. Transfer the ice cream to a resealable plastic or stainless-steel container and freeze overnight.

### Hazelnut-Mocha Ice Cream

*Yields 1 generous quart.*

**4 oz. good-quality semisweet chocolate, chopped**  
**1¾ cups heavy cream**  
**1½ cups skim milk**  
**½ cup light brown sugar, packed**  
**5 large or 4 extra-large egg yolks**  
**½ cup skim milk powder**  
**Large pinch salt**  
**1 Tbs. unsweetened cocoa powder**  
**2 Tbs. coffee powder (preferably espresso style)**  
**½ cup whole blanched hazelnuts**  
**½ tsp. natural vanilla extract**  
**1½ Tbs. Frangelico**

**Prepare the chocolate.** Melt the chocolate slowly in a small bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water.



This pale ice cream is intensely flavored. Triple-infused with the flavor of oranges (zest, juice, and Cointreau liqueur), the creaminess is memorably contrasted with toasted pecans and tart, chewy cherries.

Photo: Mary Ellen Bartley

## Customize the recipe with fruits, nuts, and flavorings

For some people, ice cream isn't worth eating if it doesn't have "chunks." These ingredients should be added about 8 to 10 minutes after the ice cream has begun freezing; at this point, the mixture will be thick enough to prevent the chunks from sinking to the bottom. Some additions need a little preparation before they can be added to the ice cream, and some ice-cream bases need adjustment to accept the additions.

**FRESH AND DRIED FRUITS**—Fruit contains a lot of water, which will always result in iciness. One solution is to use a little more cream and a little less milk in the base and to add a little extra skim milk powder to the mixture. You also can remove some of the fruit's water by partially dehydrating the fruit in a very low oven for an hour or two. While this diminishes the fruit's fresh flavor, it also prevents the chunks of fruit from turning into icy fruit pebbles in your ice cream.

On the other hand, dried fruits such as raisins or dried cherries need some liquid before they can be added to ice cream. Plump them in fruit juice or a spirit (such as rum, brandy, or kirsch) for an hour or two. You won't need much liquid—perhaps two tablespoons for half a cup of dried fruit.

**NUTS**—For the best flavor, nuts should be toasted before adding them to ice cream. Pistachios are trouble-makers; they absorb a lot of water and quickly become soft in ice cream.

**ALCOHOL**—Alcohol reduces the freezing point and makes ice cream easier to scoop. And of course there's the flavor alcohol can add—Chocolate-Triple Sec ice cream is one of my favorites. After you cool the custard base, try adding a tablespoon of alcohol for each pint of base. For stronger flavor, add two to three tablespoons alcohol to the mixture as it cooks. The heat will cook out some of the alcohol that would make the ice cream too soft. Still, that extra liquid means you'll need to add a little more skim milk powder (start with one teaspoon) to make up the difference.



Stir often. When melted, take it from the heat and set it aside.

**Make the ice-cream base.** Fill a medium saucepan half-way with water and set it over medium heat. Combine the cream, milk, brown sugar, egg yolks, skim milk powder, and salt in a stainless-steel bowl. Add the melted chocolate, cocoa powder, and coffee powder. Whisk to mix completely. Don't worry if the chocolate appears to "curdle"; it will smooth out.

Put the bowl on the saucepan and cook the mixture, stirring constantly, until the base reaches between 165° and 180°F. Test the temperature with a candy thermometer. Keep the temperature in that range for 10 to 15 min. The mixture will thicken.

**Cool the ice-cream base.** At the end of the cooking period, put the bowl in an ice bath to cool. Add the

vanilla extract and the Frangelico. Stir frequently, replenishing the ice as necessary, until the mixture cools to 65° (about 15 min.). Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight.

**Prepare the hazelnuts.** Toast the hazelnuts on a baking sheet in a 350° oven for about 10 min., shaking the sheet occasionally to prevent burning. The nuts are ready when they color slightly and become fragrant. Chop the nuts coarse and set aside.

**Freeze the ice cream.** Freeze the base according to your ice-cream maker's instructions. After 8 to 10 min., the ice cream should be semisolid—about the stiffness of cake batter. At this point, add the hazelnuts. Continue freezing until the ice cream holds stiff peaks. Transfer the ice cream to a resealable plastic or stainless-steel container and freeze overnight until firm.

### Caramel Sauce

This is a great ice-cream topping, or use it to make Caramel Ice Cream with Toasted Almonds (see recipe at left). Yields 1½ cups.

**1 cup sugar  
1 cup heavy cream**

**Melt the sugar.** Put the sugar in a heavy 3- or 4-qt. saucepan. Set the pan over medium-high heat until the sugar melts. Shake the pan occasionally to distribute the unmelted sugar, but do not stir; this can encourage lumps. When the sugar is melted and bubbly, continue cooking, shaking the pan occasionally.

For a sweet caramel sauce, cook until the sugar turns light brown; for a richer, less-sweet sauce, let the caramel become medium or dark brown. (For more on caramelizing sugar, see *Fine Cooking* #1, pp. 35–39.)

**Add the cream.** As soon as the sugar reaches the correct color, remove the pan from the heat and begin whisking in the cream, about ¼ cup at a time. Be extremely careful; the cream will make the caramel foam dramatically, and you can burn yourself on the steam or overflow.

**Cook the sauce.** After all the cream has been added, return the sauce to a low flame for about a minute. If the sauce is too thick, whisk in more cream. While still warm, transfer the sauce to a Pyrex or stainless-steel container. Use it immediately, or let it cool to room temperature and reheat it in a water bath or in the microwave.

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Andrew Hingston founded Hingston's Iced Cream in London. He lives in St. Helena, California. ♦

**Give hot caramel plenty of room.** When you add cream to the hot sugar, the sauce will boil furiously. Hot caramel can burn terribly, so be sure your pot is large enough to contain the sauce.



## BASICS

Here we offer quick "technique classes," so you can learn new skills or refresh the skills you already have, from choosing and handling raw ingredients, to using tools, to preparing basic recipes.

# Buying and Preparing Shrimp

**E**veryone, it seems, loves to eat shrimp, but cooks often steer clear of serving it at home. Shrimp has a reputation for being tedious to prepare, and, unless you're familiar with the sizes and grading system, buying shrimp can be confusing.

Colossal, jumbo, large, and medium are familiar labels to shrimp lovers, but what most people don't understand is that these are not standardized sizes but simply marketing terms. Within the industry, shrimp is graded according to the number per pound, known as the weight count. For instance, if you order a pound of what is commonly called medium shrimp, you'll be buying 26 to 30 shrimp. Weight count is important because shrimp is sometimes mislabeled. Asking for it by count rather than size means you'll be assured of what you're buying.

### PEELING AND DEVEINING IS FAST IF YOU KNOW WHAT PART TO PULL

Don't automatically peel shrimp without considering how you plan to prepare them. Shrimp cooked in their shell have more flavor, are juicier, and are less likely to

#### PEELING SHRIMP



*Use your fingers to pry open and pull back the first few sections of shell, starting at the large end.*



*Remove the rest of the shell by gently tugging on the very end of the shrimp's tail.*

#### DEVEINING SHRIMP



*To expose the sand vein, make a shallow cut along the shrimp's back.*



*Then gently lift out the vein with the tip of your knife.*

be overcooked than shrimp that have been peeled. Although some diners may be squeamish about peeling shrimp at the table, seafood lovers will appreciate the extra flavor. Grilled shrimp particularly benefit from being cooked with their shells intact. But peeling shrimp before cooking

makes sense for dishes in which it would be inconvenient to retrieve and peel the shrimp, such as soups, pastas, or stir-fries.

To peel shrimp, whether cooked or raw, start by grasping the first sections of shell (see photo above) and prying them open so that the shell splits along the shrimp's underside. Then tug on the end of the shrimp to slide off the entire shell.

Before you pull off the tail, think about how you intend to serve the shrimp. If the shrimp are part of an hors d'oeuvre platter and people will be picking them up with their fingers or dipping them into a sauce, the tail makes a natural handle. The tail also comes in handy if you're dipping the shrimp in a batter before cooking. If the shrimp is part of a dish that's intended to be eaten with a fork, removing the tail is up to you. Some people think that the tails add flavor, others find them unpleasant.

### SHRIMP SIZES, COMMON MARKET NAMES, AND USES

Count per pound	Best use
12 or fewer (colossal)	Stuffing and grilling
16 to 20 (jumbo)	Appetizers, poaching, stuffing, and grilling
21 to 25 (large)	Appetizers, poaching, soups, pastas, and sautés
26 to 30 (medium)	Soups, pastas, and sautés
41 to 50 (small)	Same as for medium shrimp
70 or more (salad or extra small)	Mayonnaise-bound salads, or puréed for stuffing

*Editors' note: While many retailers use the common market names shown above to describe*

*the number of shrimp per pound, these names have not been standardized by any government agency. Most reputable fish merchants post the weight count or will gladly tell you.*

**BUTTERFLYING SHRIMP**

*Don't cut too deep. Slice just deep enough to open up the shrimp without cutting it in half.*



*Ready to stuff. A perfectly butterflied shrimp creates a neat pocket for a savory seafood stuffing.*

**Devein with two quick steps.** Though deveining is often thought of as a tiresome task, it's really quite simple. The point of deveining shrimp is to remove the small, dark "sand vein" (the shrimp's digestive tract) that runs along the back. Eating this vein won't make you sick, but it can be gritty. To devein shrimp without peeling, cut down the back of the shrimp with kitchen shears and then pull out the vein with the tip of a paring knife. To devein a peeled shrimp, slit the flesh with a knife and lift out the vein (see photos at left).

**SHRIMP FOR STUFFING AND STIR-FRYING**

Butterflied shrimp are simply shrimp that have been cut open to lie flat. Keep in mind that the larger surface area means the shrimp cook more quickly. Butterflied shrimp are perfect for a superquick spin in

the wok or as a platform for a seafood stuffing. To butterfly, trace the original cut—where the vein used to be—slicing deeply, but taking care not to cut completely through (see photos at left).

**SHELLS MAKE A DELICIOUS SHRIMP STOCK**

If you've peeled your shrimp raw, you can use the shells to make a quick stock. Shrimp stock has incredible flavor and can be used for soups, sauces, and as a poaching liquid for fish and other shellfish. This intense broth won't be particularly pleasing tasted straight, but it will add lots of shrimp flavor to other food. Just toss the shells from one to two pounds of shrimp in a saucepan with a cup and a half of cold water, a half cup of dry white wine, a bay leaf, a rib of celery, and some chopped onion. Bring the liquid to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer gently for 25 minutes. Strain the liquid and discard the solids. Shrimp stock freezes well.

—Steven Petusevsky is the creative food director at Unicorn Village Market & Restaurant in Aventura, Florida.

**Be Prepared to Prevent Kitchen Fires**

A few years ago, an out-to-lunch dinner guest left a plastic bottle of vegetable oil on the stovetop after helping me with the cooking. As we ate, the bottle melted, and within minutes a good grease fire was under way. Fortunately, we were able to smother the flames before they spread. Aside from a few burnt towels and a big mess, there was no real damage—but the episode made me realize how important fire safety should be to every cook.

**YOU CAN STOP MOST FIRES BEFORE THEY START**

More house fires begin in the kitchen than in any other part of the home, and over 75% of kitchen fires start because people walk away from the kitchen. The lesson here is obvious: pay attention while you're cooking. But beyond this advice, there are precautions that will help you to avoid fires and to control those that may occur.

**Fires need fuel.** Deprive them of this and there's no fire. Small kitchen fires become larger house fires when food, oil, or greasy buildup begins to burn and the

flames then spread to counters and cabinets. You can reduce the risk by keeping kitchen surfaces and range hoods clean and free of debris. Avoid having towels, curtains, paper bags, and other flammable material near the stove or oven. Don't wear loose-fitting clothing while you're cooking: this way, there's nothing to dangle over an open flame.

**KEEP A COOL HEAD, BUT DON'T BE A HERO**

If you do have a kitchen fire, don't panic. Keep in mind that you should never try to fight a spreading fire by yourself. If a fire reaches cabinets, counters, or curtains, leave the house and call the fire department. But if you spot a small fire as it starts, there are a few simple methods to stop it.

**All fires need air,** and if you can take away a fire's air supply, it will die. Smothering a fire can be as simple as a putting a lid on a burning pot, stomping on a burning dishtowel, or covering the fire forcefully with towels. Water is a great way to extinguish some fires, but can be deadly for others, so don't automatically think of dousing the flames.

**EACH TYPE OF FIRE NEEDS A DIFFERENT RESPONSE**

Basically, there are three types of fire: grease, electrical, and paper (which includes cloth, wood, plastic, and rubber).

**Grease fires** are the greatest hazard in kitchens. Cooking oils all have a temperature limit (generally 425° to 500°F), called a flash point. When heated beyond this point, oil will burst into flames. If you reuse oil for deep-frying, be aware that as the oil gets old, this flash point drops, making it more highly flammable. Also, be aware that unrefined oils, such as extra-virgin olive oil and nut oils, break down and catch on fire at much lower temperatures.

Never throw water on a grease fire—it will splatter and spread. Instead, smother the flame with a lid or a kitchen towel. Throwing baking soda on a small grease fire will extinguish it, so keep a large, opened box of baking soda close to the stove. Salt works too, but not as effectively. The best response is to throw baking soda on the fire and cover it with a lid.

**Electrical fires** can result from faulty wiring, overloaded outlets, or malfunctioning appliances. Never throw water on



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an electrical appliance until you unplug it. If an electrical fire starts, immediately unplug the appliance. Once the appliance is unplugged, the fire is no longer electrical, and you can then safely smother the flames by dousing with water or using a towel or fire blanket. To help prevent electrical fires, keep your appliances and their cords in good condition and replace old appliances as they become worn out.

**Paper fires**, the third class of fire, may be the most obvious to deal with. To put out burning food, paper, wood, cloth, or plastic, use water freely and smother the flames. For example, pour water on a fire in a trash can or stomp on a burning cardboard box.

#### DON'T RELY ON EXTINGUISHERS

Fire extinguishers are sold for home use, but they aren't ideal for kitchen fires. People are often injured by relying on a fire extinguisher instead of calling the fire department. The dry chemical solution found in most home extinguishers is highly pressurized. Even the smallest fire extinguisher has enough force to blow a good-sized pot and its contents right off the stovetop. If you're trying to subdue some burning oil in a wok, the force of a fire extinguisher could splash burning oil across your kitchen and anyone in the way. Fire extinguishers are best used to put out wood and paper fires or to knock down a fire in order to escape a burning house. Many local fire departments offer

#### THE RULES OF FIRE SAFETY

- ◆ Never leave the kitchen when using the stovetop, especially when frying.
- ◆ Keep kitchen surfaces and range hoods free of grease and clutter.
- ◆ Don't try to fight a fire that has spread to counters or cabinets. Leave the house and call 911.
- ◆ Don't deep-fry with old grease or oil.
- ◆ Never throw water on a grease fire—try to smother the flames with baking soda, salt, a towel, or a fire blanket.
- ◆ Never throw water on an electrical appliance until you've unplugged it.
- ◆ Extinguish burning food, paper, wood, cloth, or plastic by smothering or dousing with water.
- ◆ Be wary of fire extinguishers, especially with burning oil. The force can knock the burning pan off the stove and spread the fire.

training on how to use fire extinguishers, a good idea if you plan to keep one in your home. Fire blankets are also very effective for smothering small fires. Most important, install smoke detectors on all levels of your home and check their batteries regularly.

—Molly Stevens is a chef/instructor at the New England Culinary Institute. She is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*.

#### Blanching Vegetables for Better Color and Texture

My grandmother taught me that a good cook always blanches vegetables to be eaten raw or in salads. At first I thought that she was being fussy, but I've since become a believer in blanching. I appreciate the pleasure of nibbling on a neat carrot stick or broccoli floret that is more tender and flavorful for having been blanched.

Blanching is a quick, two-step cooking technique in which vegetables are cooked briefly in a large pot of boiling water and then dunked into ice water to stop the cooking process. Vegetables intended to be part of an hors d'oeuvre platter will be more toothsome if blanched, and green, orange, and white vegetables will have a brighter, more appetizing color. Blanching is also useful for long-cooking vegetables that are part of a stir-fry or a sauté and need more than a few seconds in a hot wok or frying pan to be cooked through. If you want to grill large, dense vegetables, such as potatoes or artichokes, they'll cook more quickly if you blanch them first.

#### GIVE YOUR VEGETABLES ROOM TO MOVE

To blanch your vegetables quickly and evenly, you need a lot of water. Fill a pot with at least four times the vegetables' volume in water; for example, use two quarts of water for two cups of vegetables. Bring the water to a rapid boil and add the vegetables. The water should come back to a boil within a minute. Leave the pot uncovered and test for doneness by skewering a sample and judging its "bite." Begin timing once the water returns to a boil. The vegetables are done when they're slightly tender but not soft. Small, tender vegetables will take only a minute or so, while larger or tougher vegetables can take four or five minutes.

Scoop the cooked vegetables into a strainer and dunk them into a sink or a large bowl filled with ice and water. Once the vegetables have cooled to the touch, remove them from the ice bath or they'll start to absorb water.

**Keep the flavors separate.** If you're blanching several different vegetables, cook each one separately. You can save time, however, by reusing the water. Just be sure to move from mild to strong flavors so that your snow peas don't end up tasting like Brussels sprouts. Also, think of the colors: white celery root should go before orange carrots. Some cooks use salted water, others don't. It depends on whether the vegetables will receive further cooking and seasoning.

—Molly Stevens ♦



Use plenty of rapidly boiling water. The water should return to a boil less than a minute after the vegetables have been added.

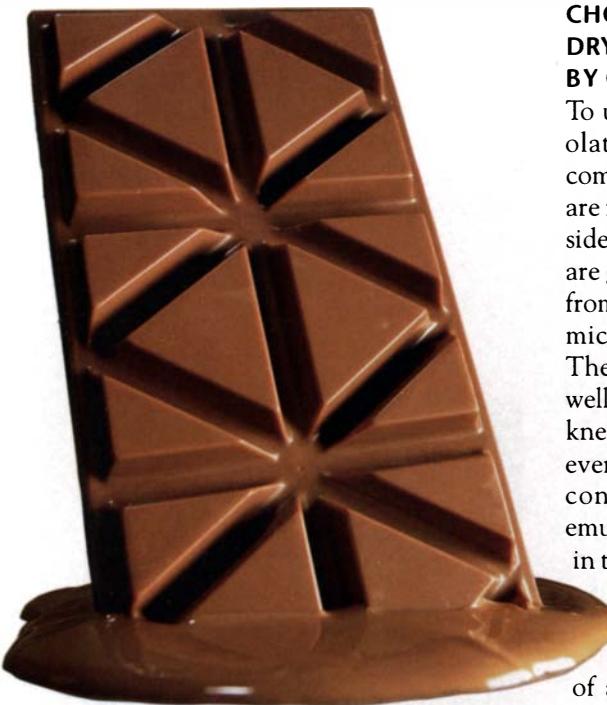


An icy plunge shocks the vegetables to stop the cooking; it also chills them and keeps them crisp.

# Take the Mystery out of Melting Chocolate

Avoid separating and seizing by monitoring temperature and moisture

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER



When Linnaeus classified the plant kingdom, he named the cocoa tree *Theobroma cacao*, the first part of which translates to "food of the gods." His choice makes perfect sense to those who think the taste of chocolate is heavenly. But you may find yourself cursing the gods when the smooth, glistening chocolate you're melting turns to dark black knots topped by a slick of oil. Or, even more startling, your melting chocolate becomes a dull, solid mass right before your eyes.

Heat and moisture—and not capricious gods—are the real culprits here. They cause the two most common mishaps when melting chocolate:

- ◆ **Separation**, caused by overheating, is when the solids in chocolate separate from the fat and clump together.
- ◆ **Seizing**, caused by moisture, is when the flowing chocolate turns into a grainy mass.

Knowing the source of these problems can help you avoid them.

## CHOCOLATE IS MADE OF DRY PARTICLES SURROUNDED BY COCOA BUTTER

To understand what happens to chocolate when it melts, try to picture its components. Dark and milk chocolates are made from "nibs" (the processed insides of the cocoa bean) and sugar that are ground until their particles measure from 25 to 75 microns in diameter. (A micron is one *millionth* of a meter.) These fine cocoa and sugar particles (as well as milk solids for milk chocolate) are kneaded with cocoa butter until they're evenly distributed. Most chocolate also contains lecithin, a natural fat and emulsifier that helps disperse the solids in the chocolate.

**Cocoa butter gives chocolate a sharp melting point.** Instead of melting gradually over a range of about 10 degrees as most fats do, cocoa butter has a sharply defined melting point, so it melts quickly when heated to around body temperature. This trait, which gives chocolate its melt-in-your-mouth quality, can cause trouble for cooks.

## OVERHEATING CAUSES CHOCOLATE TO SEPARATE

Because cocoa butter melts quickly and at a low temperature, it makes sense to melt chocolate over low heat. If you don't, it will separate irreversibly.

When chocolate gets too hot—above 120°F for dark chocolate, 115° for milk and white chocolate—the fats separate from the sugar and cocoaparticles, which then clump together. I had an assistant who once *boiled* the chocolate she was melting until there was nothing left but lumps and a pale, golden oil. Long before you reach that point, you'll know your chocolate is separating if you see small lumps forming (see photo above right).



You know your chocolate is separating when you see lumps. Long before you get these big clumps of solid chocolate, small solid knots—like those you can see on the spatula—begin to appear.

**To avoid separation, watch the temperature, not the texture.** This may seem obvious, but some unknowing cooks mistake the lumps caused by separation for solids that have yet to melt, and so they turn up the heat.

I use an accurate thermometer when melting chocolate. Beware that most kitchen thermometers are off by as much as 10 degrees. A laboratory thermometer (see sources opposite) is more reliable.

If you don't have an accurate thermometer, use your body as a gauge; it's a better judge of temperature than an inaccurate thermometer. Touch a dab of melting chocolate just above your upper lip (a very sensitive area). The correct temperature should feel warm, not hot.

**Here are some basic methods for melting chocolate safely:**

- ◆ You can melt chocolate in a saucepan directly over very low heat, but melting it over hot—not boiling—water, is usually safer. A double boiler or a hot water bath works well.
- ◆ You can also melt chocolate in the microwave. Heat dark chocolate on medium heat (50% power) and milk and white chocolate, which contain heat-sensitive milk solids, on low (30% power). Stir the chocolate every 15 seconds, heating the chocolate until it's just melted.
- ◆ Speed up melting by first cutting the chocolate into small pieces, so that more surface area is exposed to the heat.
- ◆ Stir chocolate constantly while melting to keep the temperature consistent throughout.

## UNINVITED LIQUID CAUSES SEIZING

If you haven't experienced seizing, it's hard to imagine just how startling it is. One minute you're stirring satiny liquid chocolate, the next you're trying to move your spatula through solid clumps. This happens when a small amount of moisture gets into the pan of melting chocolate and causes the dry cocoa and sugar particles that are distributed within the cocoa butter to clump together.

Richard Schwartz, Ph.D., a chemist at Wilbur Chocolates in Lititz, Pennsylvania, illustrates this phenomenon by calling to mind a bowl of sugar. When you dip the spoon that you just used to stir your coffee back into the sugar bowl, the moisture from the spoon causes the dry sugar particles to stick together.

**Protect against stray moisture by handling the chocolate carefully.** Because even a little moisture can cause

seizing, make sure that everything that touches the chocolate is bone-dry. Watch that steam or water doesn't escape into or splash onto your chocolate during heating. Before transferring the melted chocolate, wipe the sides of the pan or bowl so that water doesn't drip into the chocolate.

**A little liquid is dangerous, but a lot of it is helpful.** Though it sounds paradoxical, you can protect against seizing by melting your chocolate with larger amounts of liquid. Think about that sugar bowl again: if you pour boiling water into it, all the sugar dissolves, leaving no lumps behind. The minimum weight of liquid needed to prevent seizing is at least 25% of the weight of the chocolate; for example, 1 tablespoon of liquid (which weighs  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce) for each 2 ounces of chocolate. Any less liquid than this will cause the chocolate to seize.

## SCIENCE PROJECT—REVIVING SEIZED CHOCOLATE

To recognize how chocolate seizes, deliberately turn a little melted chocolate into a solid lump, and then bring it back to a shiny liquid.

Melt 2 to 3 ounces of finely chopped chocolate in a small saucepan in a double boiler. Spoon a teaspoon of this onto a plate to observe later; this will be your "control" chocolate. Stir a teaspoon of water into the melted chocolate in the pan. When it seizes (becomes a dull, thick, grainy paste), put a teaspoon of it on the

same plate. Next, work more water, a tablespoon at a time, into the seized chocolate, off the heat. It will become smooth and shiny once again. Put a teaspoon of this on the plate.

Both the correctly melted chocolate and the revived chocolate are smooth and shiny, but they have slightly different coloring. The seized chocolate looks dull and grainy. Eventually, the original melted chocolate will harden, while the chocolate with the added water will remain soft.



**Can you tell which of these chocolates has seized?** Seized chocolate—the middle blob—is not a pretty sight. The grainy paste is made by minute cocoa and sugar particles clumping

together. Although the salvaged seized chocolate (at right) looks almost as appealing as the properly melted chocolate (at left), its color may be off and it won't set up firm.

**Avoid seizing by melting chocolate with other ingredients.** If your recipe calls for a liquid, you can eliminate the risk of seizing by melting your chocolate with the liquid. Combine the finely chopped chocolate with the liquid in a double boiler and heat them together. Try heating the liquid and using it to melt the chocolate. When chocolatier Ortrud Carstens makes ganache, she melts her chopped semisweet chocolate by pouring it onto hot cream (see *Fine Cooking* #2, p. 66).

I occasionally see recipes—even in well-regarded cookbooks—that tell you to add a small amount of liqueur to melted chocolate. But if you're not respecting the 25% rule, the chocolate will seize. Similarly, it's safer to stir melted chocolate into other liquid ingredients than to stir liquid into melted chocolate, even when you have the correct ratio of liquid to chocolate. As the first few drops of liquid meet the chocolate, the ratio is off, and the chocolate may seize.

**Can seized chocolate be saved?** If, after taking all these precautions, your chocolate still seizes, is there anything you can do to resurrect it? Yes and no. Work a tablespoon of warm water into the mess off the heat. When this is incorporated, add more water, a tablespoon at a time, until you have a smooth, shiny chocolate. This chocolate is fine for uses like icings and fillings, but it won't work in recipes where the finished chocolate must set up firm, such as for dipped candies or chocolate curls.

## SOURCES FOR ACCURATE THERMOMETERS

*If you're a fanatic about chocolate, you might want to invest in an accurate thermometer. After breaking my fifth mercury thermometer into my chocolate, I've switched to the digital kind, which I recommend. It runs about \$50. A probe, which you'll also need, costs about \$12.*

### Laboratory instrument companies

Cooper Instruments Corp., 33 Reeds Gap Rd., Middlefield, CT 06455; 800/835-5011

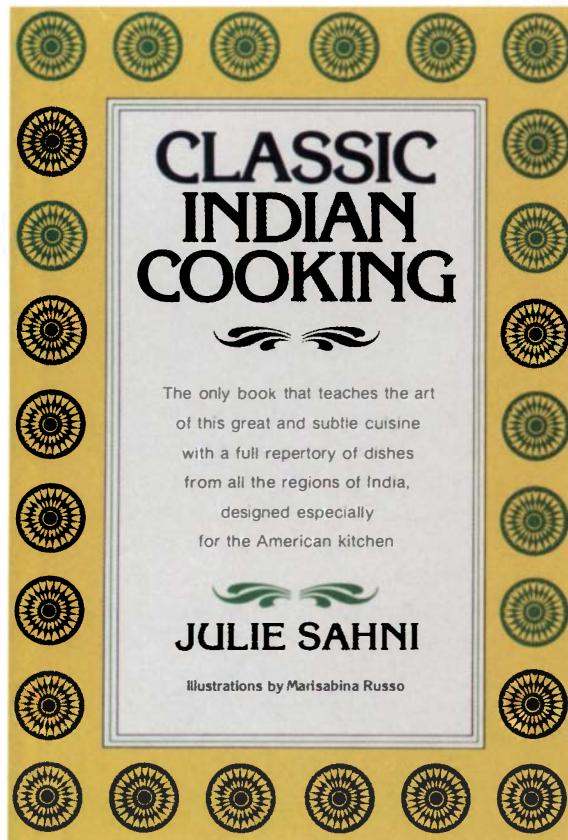
Whatman Lab Sales, PO Box 1359, Hillsboro, OR 97123; 800/942-8626

Shirley O. Corriher of Atlanta, Georgia, teaches food science and cooking classes around the country. She is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

# Four Views of Indian Cooking

Cookbooks that highlight this cuisine's exotic flavors and simple techniques

BY JUDITH SUTTON



American cooks are finally learning that there's more to Indian food than curries. The vibrantly flavored dishes and generally uncomplicated techniques that characterize Indian cooking have made it one of the most popular cuisines to hit this country in a while. Furthermore, since much of India's population is vegetarian, its cuisine includes some extraordinary vegetable dishes; these dishes are eminently appealing to American cooks who are turning to a lighter diet and rediscovering vegetables along the way.

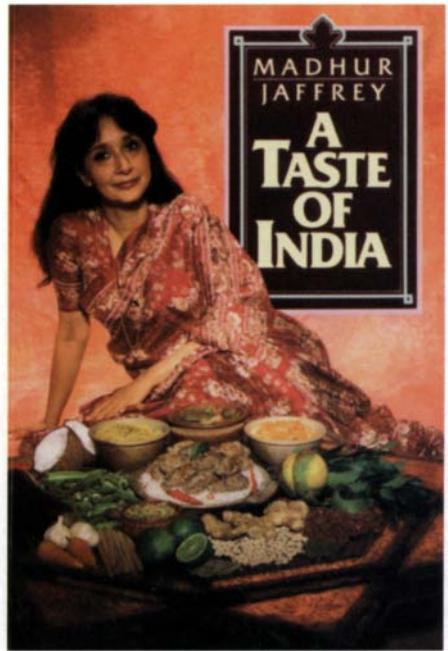
If Indian food still seems exotic, there's no reason for it to remain mysterious. Many of the ingredients used most often in Indian dishes have become far more widely available than they were even a few

years ago. Much of what you need is waiting for you at any good grocery store, and a single trip to an Indian or other specialty food market should be enough to stock your pantry with the more unusual seasonings called for in the four books discussed here.

For recent converts to Indian food, Julie Sahni's first book, *Classic Indian Cooking*, is just about the best introduction to traditional Indian cuisine there is. The introductory section, nearly 100 pages long, serves as a mini cooking course. Sahni begins with an extensive glossary of the seasonings that define Indian cooking. She devotes only a few pages to equipment, reassuring readers that most Indian dishes can be prepared with the utensils and tools found in any American kitchen. Sahni concentrates on techniques and finishes with a guide to planning an Indian meal. Useful line drawings throughout the book illustrate techniques and unfamiliar ingredients.

Sahni grew up in northern India, and the cooking of that region is her specialty, but all of the various regional cuisines are represented here, with recipe headnotes giving the provenance of the dishes. The book begins with a chapter on snacks and appetizers. Although in most of India, traditional meals don't have separate courses, the custom of serving a first course has been adopted in some upscale households—and Indians have always enjoyed nibbling on such delicacies as Silky Bean Dumplings throughout the day. The succeeding chapters are devoted

**For recent converts to Indian food, Julie Sahni's first book is just about the best introduction to traditional Indian cuisine there is.**

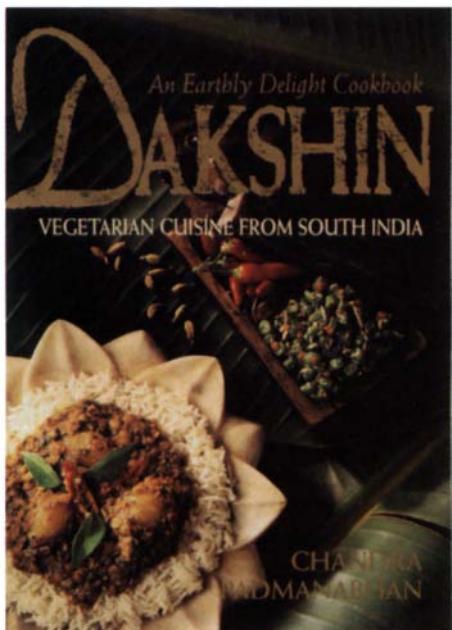


to main dishes, side dishes and other accompaniments, and desserts and beverages. The recipes are clearly written, with explicit instructions and detailed explanations at each step of the way. In addition, every recipe is followed by thoughtful suggestions for serving the dish as part of a variety of different menus—a light meal, an all-seafood dinner, or perhaps a particularly spicy menu—according to the cook's whim.

Madhur Jaffrey's *A Taste of India* also concentrates on classic Indian cooking, but her book is part cookbook, part travel-

ogue, and part cultural and culinary history. Recipes are arranged by region. The book is filled with color photographs of breathtaking landscapes and lively urban scenes, of people and architectural landmarks, of market stalls heaped with produce, sacks overflowing with grains and legumes, and of the dishes created from these ingredients.

The introduction to each section provides a brief overview of the region's history, and then describes the characteristic features of the cuisine, often through personal anecdotes from people Jaffrey encountered in her travels. The special foods reserved for celebrations and



home cooks Jaffrey met along the way, so you find, for example, Spicy Crabs from Ruby Palchoudhuri's Household in the Bengal chapter. Like Sahni, Jaffrey grew up in northern India, and most of the recipes in the Delhi chapter, as well as a good number of those in the other sections, are her own.

With Chandra Padmanabhan's *Dakshin—Vegetarian Cuisine from South India*, the lesser-known cooking of the southern half of India comes into its own. Padmanabhan's beautifully illustrated book provides a wonderful introduction to the unusual, spicy, and mouthwatering vegetable dishes of the country's southern states (*Dakshin* is Sanskrit for "south"). She provides only a brief introduction to the cuisine, but the recipes and tantalizing color photographs of most of the dishes more than make up for this shortcoming. A glossary and the headnotes to the recipes provide additional information.

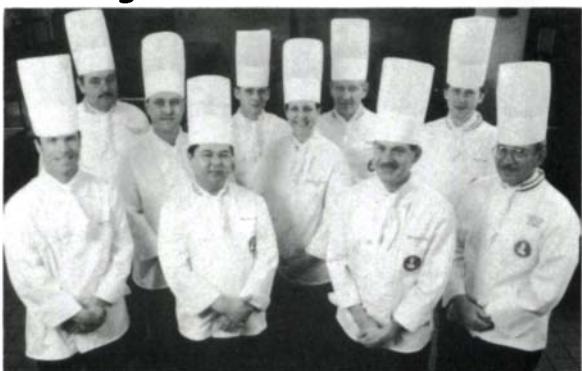
In contrast to the rest of the country, southern Indian meals usually consist of separate courses. Padmanabhan starts

with sambars, served as first courses—thick, spicy sauce/stews, such as Pepper Sambar or Curry-Leaf Sambar. Next are the soupy, often piquant rasams, such as Lemon or Ginger Rasam; cooling yogurt dishes are usually the third course. Most of these dishes will be new to American readers; in fact, even Sahni and Jaffrey include only one sambar recipe each. The book also includes vegetable dishes served as accompaniments or as a lighter meal, salads, a separate section on rice dishes, and snacks. Padmanabhan's prose is not always wonderful, and there are a few oversights (no basic recipe for cooking rice is included), but simply leafing through the book will make you want to try almost every dish.

For a cross-cultural interpretation, there is Neelam Batra's *The Indian Vegetarian—Flavors of India for the American Kitchen*. Although she is a native of New Delhi, Batra has lived in California, where she teaches cooking, for more than twenty years. Consequently, her cooking style is an intriguing mix of old and new. In

ceremonies frequently figure in these descriptions. Together, the text and photographs create a vivid and lively portrait of India and its people, setting the recipes in their context. Many recipes come from

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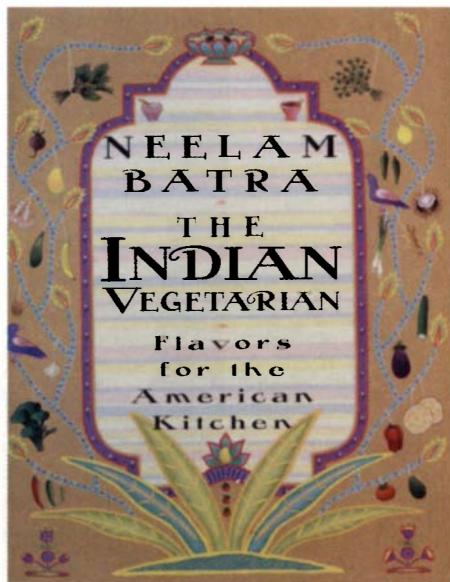
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addition to traditional recipes, there are dishes inspired by her discoveries in the farmers' market, such as Fresh Black-Eyed Peas in Tomato Fenugreek Sauce; recipes that blend different ethnic cuisines, such as Rice with Basil & Sun-Dried Tomatoes; and "new-style" Indian dishes, such as Wild Rice with Cardamom Pods & Bay Leaves, that combine traditional Indian flavorings with ingredients not known there. In another departure from the norm, Batra devotes a chapter to Indian sauces, not usually treated as separate recipes, with the intention of making them more versatile, rather than just the base for specific dishes. For example, she recommends serving Creamy Saffron Sauce not only with Nine Jewel Vegetables but also with any grilled vegetable or with pasta—and she suggests serving Fresh Mango & Ginger Sauce with pakoras, sautéed vegetables, or Chinese egg rolls.

Oddly enough, although she mentions India's large vegetarian population, Batra never really describes the vegetarian diet as such. She occasionally refers



to nutritional benefits and to "heart-healthy" dishes, but many headnotes suggest pairing the recipes with grilled or barbecued meats or with chicken or fish. These suggestions sound good; they just seem somewhat surprising in a book with "vegetarian" in the title. Perhaps the

book is mistitled—with its fresh flavors and creative interpretation of Indian cooking, its appeal certainly isn't limited to vegetarians.

#### PUBLISHING INFORMATION

*Classic Indian Cooking*, by Julie Sahni. Morrow, 1980. \$25, hardcover; 542 pp. ISBN 0-688-03721-6.

*A Taste of India*, by Madhur Jaffrey. Macmillan, 1985. \$24.95, paperback; 256 pp. ISBN 0-689-70726-6.

*Dakshin—Vegetarian Cuisine from South India*, by Chandra Padmanabhan. Harper Collins, 1994. \$24, hardcover; 164pp. ISBN 0-207-18477-1.

*The Indian Vegetarian—Flavors of India for the American Kitchen*, by Neelam Batra, with Shelly Rothschild-Sherwin. Macmillan, 1994. \$25, hardcover; 380pp. ISBN 00-02-507675-2.

Judith Sutton received a grand diplôme from La Varenne cooking school in Paris. She is a food writer and recipe developer in New York City. ♦

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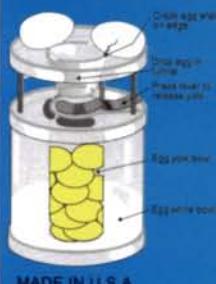
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# Golden, Fragrant Saffron

Add color and an irresistible aroma to everything from mashed potatoes to bouillabaisse

BY SAM HAYWARD



The flavor of saffron is difficult to describe, but its presence in food is unmistakable. Slightly bitter, intensely aromatic, and a little bit sweet, once you taste it you'll never forget it. Turmeric and ground safflower petals can tint food the same golden hue, but there's no substitute for the taste of true saffron.

The spice itself is the stigma of a fall-blooming crocus (*Crocus sativus*) that's native to the eastern Mediterranean and southern Europe. Today, saffron is cultivated mainly in Spain, Iran, and northern India. Because it's harvested and processed entirely by hand, as it has been for centuries, saffron is one of the costliest of spices—over \$200 per pound.

## TOAST THE THREADS TO RELEASE SAFFRON'S PRECIOUS FLAVOR

The uncomplicated flavor of starchy foods, such as grains, pasta, and potatoes, provides an ideal backdrop for saffron's own exotic taste. Add saffron to a broth for steaming couscous, and you'll infuse the finished dish with its delicate fragrance. *Risotto Milanese*, the classic Italian rice dish, gets its golden color and irresistible aroma from saffron. Throughout Scandinavia, saffron is used to season breads and cakes. And, of course, no paella or bouillabaisse is complete without a dose of saffron. When I want to spoil myself, I add some to my mashed potatoes.

**For even color and maximum flavor, don't add saffron directly;** instead, first make a reduced saffron infusion.

◆ Crumble the threads slightly and lightly toast them in a dry pan over very low heat. Heating the saffron liquefies their color- and flavor-bearing oils and makes for a more flavorful infusion.

◆ Next, add a little hot water, bring to a boil, and reduce the mixture slightly. Add this infusion to whatever you're cooking, for example, the liquid for a rice pilaf, a soup, or a bread dough. There's no need to strain the infusion.

This technique is useful when combining saffron with acidic ingredients, such as vinegar, lemon juice, and very tart wines, which inhibit its ability to color.

Saffron's high price and intense flavor dictate that it be used sparingly. One-quarter teaspoon is enough to flavor one cup of uncooked rice, enough for four average servings. Too much saffron is not a good thing—it will leave your food with an unpleasant medicinal taste.

## RED THREADS MEAN THE FINEST SAFFRON

Most saffron available in North America comes from the Mancha region of Spain and is graded according to the ratio of red to yellow threads. The best and costliest saffron has the fewest yellow threads. The finest-grade Spanish saffron, called *coupe*, is rarely available in our markets. We do enjoy a plentiful supply of "superior" grade Spanish saffron, which typically contains a red-to-yellow ratio of ten to one.

The most prized saffron comes from the Kashmir region of India, but because of political strife in that region, very little Kashmir saffron gets to American markets. The best Kashmir saffron, Mogra Cream, is pure vermilion with no yellow threads. Penzeys, Ltd., Spice House (414/574-0277), is the only source I know of in this country for Kashmir Mogra Cream saffron.

Powdered saffron, less expensive than the whole threads, isn't worth the savings. Like any ground spice, saffron's flavor and aroma fade quickly when crushed. Also, unscrupulous traders sometimes combine powdered saffron with turmeric and other inferior ingredients.

Saffron is a seasonal crop and is best purchased shortly after the harvest in the fall. Even though saffron is partially dried when it's processed, it should still feel soft and moist, never brittle or hard. To keep saffron moist and fragrant, transfer it to an airtight glass jar and store it in the freezer.

Sam Hayward is the executive chef at the Harraseeket Inn in Freeport, Maine. ♦

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Here we show off the work of cooks who are good at showing off their food. The featured cook selects a few signature dishes and explains how each one is assembled and presented.

# Tropical Temptations

by Douglas Rodriguez,  
chef/owner of Patria, New York City



**Giraldi Puro de Chocolate (Chocolate Cigar).** Even nonsmokers like to order this cigar after dinner. I make this popular dessert by covering a piece of sponge cake with a stiff chocolate mousse. Using plastic wrap, I roll the ingredients into a cigar shape and freeze it. Before serving, I roll the cigar in a blend of cocoa powder and confectioners' sugar. The matchsticks are a *pastillage*, made from confectioners' sugar, vinegar, and gelatin, that is rolled and cut into shape. I dip the tips in thinned pink royal icing. The matchbook is a cookie that's molded while it's still hot from the oven. The plate is finished with a scoop of spice-bread ice cream and a dusting of confectioners' sugar and cocoa powder.



**Honduran Seviche.** In this variation on seviche, I toss raw tuna with ginger, minced chile, and coconut milk. To present the dish, I fill a large, concave plate with ice and sprinkle that with diced red peppers, shaved coconut, and mâche. I fill half of a dry coconut with the seviche and set that on top of the ice. A couple of slices of fried green plantain explode out of the coconut shell for added excitement and flavor.



**Chilean Salmon.** The most striking aspect of this dish is the ring of potatoes that circles the mango-mustard-glazed salmon and calamari-studded rice. To make the ring, I cut spaghetti-like strands of potatoes using a special tool from Japan, wrap the strands around a metal ring, and deep-fry them. After carefully sliding the fried potatoes off the ring, I arrange them on the plate, layer the rice and the salmon over the bottom of the ring, and garnish with watercress and chives. ♦

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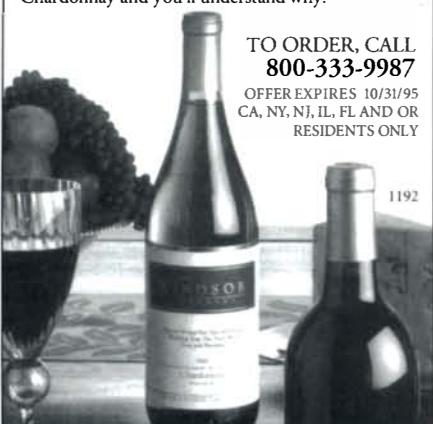
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# CALENDAR

Sponsoring an event that you want readers to know about? Send an announcement to Calendar, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Be sure to include dates, a complete address, and the phone number to call for more information. Listings are free, but restricted to events of direct interest to cooks. The deadline for entries in the December/January issue is September 1.

## ARKANSAS

Festival—19th Annual Hope Watermelon Festival, August 17–20, Fair Park, Hope. Call 501/777-3640.

## CALIFORNIA

Showcase—4th Annual Mendocino Bounty, August 20, Fetzer Food & Wine Center at Valley Oaks, Hopland. Sample food and wine from over 100 county producers. Call Kate at 707/462-3306.

Festival—11th Annual A La Carte, A La Park, September 2–4, Sharon Meadow, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. For information, call 415/383-9378.

Workshop—9th Annual American Harvest Workshop, September 10–13, Cakebread Cellars, Rutherford. Educational seminars and dinners. Call Karen Cakebread at 707/963-5221.

Festival—36th Annual Artichoke Festival, September 23–24, Castroville. Call 408/633-2465.

## COLORADO

Festival—The Denver Post LoDo BrewFest, August 12–13, Lower Downtown, Denver. Beer festival celebrating over 30 local brewpubs and microbreweries. Call Barbara Macfarlane at 303/964-8997.

## HAWAII

Festival—6th Annual Maui Onion Festival, August 4–6, Whalers Village, Kaanapali Beach, Maui. Sweet

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## ILLINOIS

Food Show—7th Annual Best of the Midwest Market at Ravinia, September 10, Ravinia Festival Grounds, Highland Park. Food and beverages from 12 Midwestern states. Call 312-RAVINIA.

## INDIANA

Festival—49th Annual Persimmon Festival, September 23–30, Main Street, Mitchell. Persimmon pudding cooking contest and a persimmon novelty desserts contest. Call 800/580-1985.

## KENTUCKY

Festival—26th Annual Marion County Ham Days, September 23–24, Main St., Lebanon. For information, call 502/692-2661.

## MAINE

Festival—48th Annual Maine Lobster Festival, August 3–6, Harbor Park, Rockland. Call 207/596-0376.

## NEW MEXICO

Festival—Santa Fe Wine & Chile Fiesta, September 28 through October 1, Santa Fe. Call 505/982-8686.

## NEW YORK

Festival—Scarborough Fair Herb Festival, September 10, Mills Mansion State Historic Site, Staatsburg. Workshops and lectures, plus culinary demonstrations by local chefs and the Culinary Institute of America. Call Andrew Koehn at 914/677-8223, ext. 105.

Contest—4th Annual Cake Decorating Contest, September 17, New York Cake & Baking Center, New York City. Open to the public. Deadline for entries: August 31. Call 212/675-CAKE.

Tasting—10th Annual AIWF Marketplace Tasting, September 23, World Trade Center Mezzanine, New York City. A meeting place where regional farmers taste and talk about food and its future with their neighbors and consumers. For information, call 212/447-0456.

## PENNSYLVANIA

Festival—National Mushroom Festival, August 31 through September 24, Kennett Square. Recipe cookoff contest: September 16. Symposium; dinner prepared by internationally acclaimed chefs: September 21. Festival with mushroom picking contest and mushroom dishes: September 24. For information, call 800/932-6369.

Festival—104th Annual Bean Soup Celebration, September 12–16, McClure. all 800/338-7389.

## TEXAS

Contest—5th Annual Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Contest, August 27, Travis County Farmers' Market, Austin. Open to the public. Deadline for entries: August 25. For information, call Elizabeth at 512/454-5766.

## WASHINGTON

Seminar—Cuisines of the Pacific Northwest, August 22–27, Seattle. Explore the region's wine and food industries, and ethnic influences unique to the Seattle area. Lectures, tours, gourmet meals, wine tastings, and cooking demonstrations. Sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and American Institute of Wine & Food. For information, call 202/357-4700.

## WISCONSIN

Conference—12th Annual American Cheese Society Conference, August 1–4, Green Bay. Call Dominique Delugeau at 414/863-1153.

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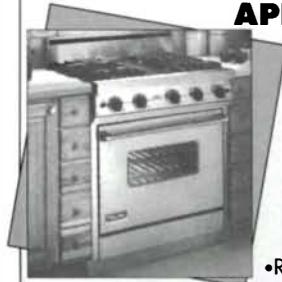
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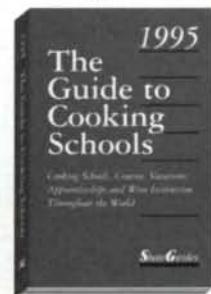
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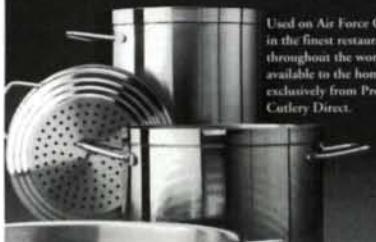
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**NUTRITION INFORMATION**

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Grilled Potato Salad	27	280	60%	3	27	19	3	14	2	0	120	3	
Grilled Mushrooms	27	180	74%	9	4	15	3	10	1	15	780	1	
Japanese Eggplant with Ginger Glaze	28	210	74%	2	14	18	2	8	6	0	530	5	
Penne with Peppers, Fennel & Basil	29	550	38%	17	71	23	4	14	3	60	500	9	
Melon, Mint & Watercress with Snapper	34	75	10%	9	9	1.0	0	0	0.5	15	570	1	
Mexican Melon Salad	34	100	18%	3	20	2.0	1.0	0.5	0	5	225	4	
Melon Sorbet	35	220	0%	0	58	0	0	0	0	0	10	1	½ cup serving
Poached Salmon with Sauce Verte	38	520	69%	38	1	40	4	21	12	105	650	0	
Salmon with Summer Vegetables	39	400	62%	26	13	28	4	18	5	130	570	4	
Sliced Salmon Salad	40	310	60%	25	6	20	3	12	4	60	850	2	
Fresh & Dried Fruit Compote	42	150	0%	1	35	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	
Classic Fresh Tomato Sauce	47	90	58%	2	9	6	1	4	1	0	280	2	
Red Clam Sauce	47	190	33%	20	13	7	1	4	1	45	360	2	
Puttanesca-Style Sauce	47	150	72%	3	10	12	2	8	1	5	610	2	
Tomato Sauce with Dried Porcinis	47	110	47%	2	14	6	1	4	1	0	280	3	
Chocolate Cream Cheese Brownies	49	150	58%	3	14	10	6	3	0	45	25	1	
Raspberry Bars	50	180	47%	2	24	9	4	4	1	25	10	1	
Chocolate Nut Bars	50	160	61%	2	15	11	5	3	2	25	30	1	
Poppy Seed Bars	51	130	59%	2	12	8	3	3	2	20	25	1	
Tabbouleh	66	180	74%	2	11	15	2	11	1	0	160	3	
Hummus	66	200	57%	6	19	13	2	6	5	0	340	4	
Baba Ghanouj	66	140	60%	4	14	9	1	3	4	0	280	6	
Foul Imdamis	67	220	40%	9	26	10	1	7	1	0	780	7	
Loubieh Bziet	67	120	51%	3	15	7	1	5	1	0	140	5	
Kibbeh	67	250	38%	26	11	10	3	6	1	75	460	2	
Labne	68	25	48%	1	2	1.5	1.0	0.5	0	5	110	0	1 Tbs.
Orange Ice Cream with Cherries	71	330	60%	4	30	22	10	8	2	145	65	1	½ cup serving
Caramel Ice Cream with Almonds	72	390	70%	6	25	30	16	10	2	205	85	1	½ cup serving
Chocolate-Hazelnut Mocha Ice Cream	72	400	69%	7	27	31	15	12	2	180	90	1	½ cup serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at TheFood Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.



## The Green Bean War

*Al dente* is not a familiar term in southern vocabularies, and to use it in conjunction with green beans is to earn a sideways glance over your sudden lapse into a foreign language. So when I moved to Kentucky from upstate New York, a staunch follower of Julia and a believer in the less-is-more school of vegetable cooking, and then married a man from a large, traditional eastern Kentucky family, a disagreement immediately ensued. In fact, it was more than a disagreement. It was a philosophical rift between my *haute cuisine* approach to green beans and time-honored southern attitudes. Green beans came to symbolize the profound cultural differences between us: me, over-educated, liberal Yankee career woman vs. him, conservative, traditional southern man. Rothko vs. Rockwell. Fruity Médocs vs. plain-speaking bourbon. And, most significantly, slightly crunchy, glowing emerald-green beans vs. boiled-for-hours-olive-drab-not-even-green-anymore beans.

When the subject of green beans arose during the first garden harvest of our marriage, I assumed that my northeastern cooking style was greeted skeptically because of lack of familiarity. I airily told my husband, "Oh, you'll love Julia's method. Trust me." I gathered the slender beans from the garden, snapped off the ends,

washed them, and then steamed them for just a few minutes, long enough to set the emerald color and to slightly tenderize the pods. After plunging them in ice water, draining and drying them, I lightly sautéed them in butter, added salt, pepper, and lots of fresh parsley, and splashed them with fresh lemon juice. With all the fervor of a missionary winding up before a prime prospect for conversion, I served those splendid beans and waited for the accolades. My

I savored the velvety,  
smoky quality of these  
homely garden soldiers.  
Now I knew!  
This was bean-ness.

husband dutifully poked them, chewed a few, and murmured, "They're all right. Not bad." He's a man of few words, so that was high praise, I thought.

The various bush and pole bean crops were diligently served up *à la française* most of that summer. One afternoon, I came home from work to a large pot simmering on the stove. Pinkish-gray bacon drooped over a mass of olive softness, beans so

cooked their pods had split. They looked awful, but I had to admit the aroma was promising. I wrinkled my nose and remarked, "I see we're doing southern tonight." A noncommittal grunt was the response. I stuck a fork in the pot and tasted a few. "Not bad," I acknowledged. "They have good flavor." We had reached an impasse. Oh, we were polite. Neither criticized the other's cooking methods, but then neither openly, enthusiastically endorsed the other's style. By some unspoken agreement, we simply alternated bean styles for the next few years. Gradually I stopped trying to make bush and pole varieties behave in an undercooked state and capitulated to local ways.

This past spring, no doubt feeling a little guilty over the issue, my husband planted Slenderettes, announcing that this variety would better suit my ways in the kitchen. He also put in rows of White Half-Runners, a strapping, muscular, stringed variety that requires some patience to ready for cooking. I fixed the Slenderettes but felt they lacked any real character. Meanwhile, the Half-Runners seemed to explode, and we frantically canned or gave bushels to a neighbor who, for some reason, got very excited about them. But I wasn't anxious to try them and always found something else from the garden for dinner.

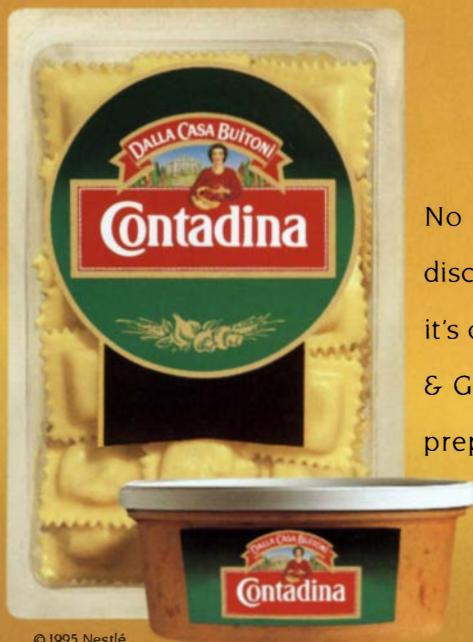
One late August afternoon, my husband fixed a large pot of Half-Runners. Stabbing a fork into the mess before dinner, I sampled the afternoon's pickings. Suddenly, I knew. What was this? I tasted more. And more. I rolled those beans around in my mouth, savoring the richness, the depth, the stunning, velvety, smoky quality of those homely garden soldiers. Now I knew! This is what green beans were all about. This was bean-ness. You can hybridize the varieties, you can engineer the strings away and mandate the shape, size, and maturity date, but some things cannot be improved. No green beans have ever tasted better to me.

I haven't completely abandoned Julia. This spring I'll insist on a packet of mini filet bean seeds. But I'll also look forward to real Kentucky green beans—lovingly boiled with onion, bacon, salt, pepper, and the right attitude. And I might just have some bourbon before dinner.

—Harriet W. Fowler,  
Nicholasville, Kentucky ♦



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# New flour from old millstones

This reproduction of an eighteenth-century gristmill was hand built by Ken and Dora Moore for their flour mill and bakery in Ukiah, California. The mill pairs two 100-year-old grindstones (one shown, one encased below it) with new PVC grain-delivery pipes to grind up to 50 pounds of flour per hour. The Moores grind all their flour with this gristmill.



*This old-fashioned gristmill works daily to grind wheat, corn, rye, and oats into flour, which is baked into bread and sold at the Moore's bakery.*



*Grain flows from a loft through the pipes to a hopper on top of the mill.*



*The hopper channels the grain into the center of the top millstone, which spins against a stationary bottom stone.*



*The ground flour spins out to the edges of the stones and falls down a chute, filling a cloth sack.*